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# Social change and adaptation to widowhood.

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SOCIAL CHANGE  
AND  
ADAPTATION TO WIDOWHOOD

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by

© Uta Engmann

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
through the Department of  
Sociology and Anthropology in Partial Fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Arts at  
the University of Windsor

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Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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"Individuals who belong to the same generation, who share the same year of birth, are endowed, to that extent, with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process."

Karl Mannheim - The Problem of Generations

ABSTRACT

SOCIAL CHANGE  
AND  
ADAPTATION TO WIDOWHOOD

by  
Uta Engmann

This study examined twenty widows between 70 and 82 years of age, of whom ten were of German and ten of Jewish background. Its purpose was to investigate the influence of social support systems and past experiences on the process of adaptation to widowhood.

While quantitative analyses have been predominantly used in the examination of adjustment processes they have nevertheless failed to explain the meaning of interaction processes, experiences and behaviour in relation to the widow's social reality.

Symbolic Interactionism was therefore considered the most suitable theoretical framework to explain adaptation processes as they relate to an individual's life history within the context of family and friends, of socialization, ethnic identification and structural conditions. Using this premise, the subjective evaluation represents an interpretation of self and other and takes into consideration past experiences in relation to present situations.

Given this consideration, it was decided to conduct the investigation on the basis of a semi-structured interview that inquired into structural dimensions of the widow and a

clinical interview that examined the life history in relation to the family life cycle.

The findings suggest that although structural variables obviously impact on an individual's life, in the final analysis it is the meaning that these variables hold for each widow; their definition and interpretation within the context of history and ethnic background strongly influence the process of adjustment and the resultant evaluation of life quality in widowhood.



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Uta Engmann

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

To date in Canada and the United States, more than forty percent of women between the age of 65 and 74 years and almost seventy percent of women over 75 years of age are widows. This generation of old women in general and old widows in particular has been reduced to women in relatively functionless positions of self-maintenance, once the role of mother and wife are rendered obsolete, the first role being phased out at the empty nest stage, the second at the death of the husband.

These widows, socialized by parents who were the product of traditional values, were themselves socialized in to the traditional pattern of sex role segregation and now find themselves in old age often poor, sometimes lonely and mostly without opportunities for employment or remarriage. While their men were socialized to individuate, these women were raised to affiliate to husband and children. Thus the widows of 65 years and older most often had been encouraged to envision their social life in terms of two core roles, namely wife and mother, and these roles were most likely to influence their life quality and shape their self-concept.

In this society, most women take on the role of wife voluntarily, that is by choice, but the role of widow occurs most often abruptly and unexpectedly and is hardly a matter for anticipatory socialization.

The death of a spouse is considered to be one of the most serious life crises with which a woman has to deal. It represents the loss of a socially valued role that carries with it identity, status and prestige.

Adjustment to widowhood has been researched mainly through quantitative analysis by examining such variables as age, sex, health, education, occupation, income and length of widowhood. Additionally, some research has focused on primary and secondary reference groups as important variables in the adaptation process, but few of these studies have placed emphasis on such factors as ethnicity, race or history.

The thrust of this study directs itself to the argument that correlational analyses fall short in explaining interaction processes that have their origin in past events and cultural heritage and may therefore affect an individuals' interpretation of present reality.

The adjustment to widowhood must first deal with the immediate emotional crisis of bereavement. Additionally, and usually the second stage in the adjustment process, is the need to restructure the widow's life so that she may readapt to her new social role and a meaningful life pattern.

Therefore this study will focus on the individual, the widow: how she copes with this restructuring process, how she evaluates social support systems and how she eventually adjusts to her new role.



As such, her subjective evaluations present a personal judgement about self and others and take into consideration the meanings of past experiences and present situations. Since the world of her everyday experience is born out of a network of relationships which revolve around social roles, social values and group membership over the life course, they are by definition also shaped by history.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature and Theoretical Orientation

After the death of a spouse, family relationships are thought to be significantly associated with the well-being of the surviving person. The availability of kin for social interaction and emotional support serves as a buffer against negative outcomes from major life transitions, including widowhood. Therefore, widowhood constitutes an important case in which the nature of family support can be examined.

The general belief is that when the husband of a woman dies, nuclear and extended family as well as friends help the widow through the emotional trauma and assist her with the management of everyday affairs. However, present research results are rather contradictory, with some supporting and others rejecting such beliefs (Morgan, 1984:323-32).

The most comprehensive research into adjustment processes during widowhood have been conducted in the United States, and the following examples serve to illustrate the wide range of variables which various studies have identified in relation to widowhood.

Lopata (1973) in her study of Chicago area widows found that emotional support by family usually tapers off when children and relatives have to get on with everyday life, such as jobs or their own household management. She found that at this time especially daughters define role-appropriate behaviour for their widowed mothers by reminding them that

their technically functionless role will have to be renegotiated from the perspective of a single person rather than that of a couple.

In her work on women as widows Lopata (1979) found that in a broad segment of her sample daughters were prone to advice giving and tried to define roles and behaviour for their widowed mother, which often lead to strained relationships in which the widow usually acquiesced for fear of isolation and alienation. Lopata concluded that formal support and social contact does not necessarily constitute meaningful support, and is therefore insufficient to maintain feelings of closeness and does not engender positive self-concept in the widow.

While Lopata's conclusion with regard to advice giving may reveal a shift in the mother/daughter power position, whereby the daughter becomes a more determining force of mother's behaviour, it nevertheless fails to explain the circumstances that may render some widows more prone to acquiescence than others.

Secondly, the widow's definition of the situation for which the advice is given, i.e., the importance of the situation for the widow, may be influential in her decision making process to adhere to or reject advice.

Thirdly, a widow's past experiences during her marriage concerning autonomy and decision-making may explain a variance between widows of different background.

Heinemann (1983) found that especially old widows expect loyalties from their children, but that sons more often identified these as obligations, such as the weekly Saturday visit, phone call or shopping trip, whereas daughters perceived them as a form of interaction and communication.

Overall support during widowhood was found to be forthcoming more from children than other extended kin. In the widows' in-law circle there were few contributions in the emotional support areas, such as visiting, and less than moderate support in service-rendered areas such as repairs, maintenance and legal help. The same study also found little financial support offered by either children or siblings (Lopata, 1978:355-363).

Similarly, in his article on quality and closeness of interaction with in-laws, Gubrium (1975:179-95) states that this support will ultimately depend on one's self-validation in that group. This validation affects a variety of interpersonal expectations and routines in the widow's daily life. How a widow eventually feels about her in-law family, and how she is accepted by them, is determined at the outset of the courtship with her husband, at which time her acceptance or rejection into his family is established. Thus, the degree of acceptance or rejection is likely to impinge on future interaction processes during marriages, as well as widowhood, and can therefore affect extension of support at the latter time.

Length of widowhood (the amount of time since the death of a spouse) has been identified as having important consequences on a widow's perceived importance of family support. The longer widowhood has been in effect the more likely the occurrence that the widow will distance herself from family dependency and invest her time in friendship relations and leisure activities or even work (Ferraro and Barresi, 1982:227-47; Morgan, 1976:687-695). The literature further indicates that socio-economic status influences the degree of family contact and support, where widows with high educational attainment, previous working experience and sufficient income preferred to live alone and lead independent lifestyles.

Research into friendship patterns among widows has found that length of widowhood in combination with previous lifestyle, age, health, as well as ethnicity and race shapes the extent to which friendship patterns will develop (Lopata, 1977:93-104).

Similarity of background seems to ensure the possibility of relatively equal exchanges of ideas, interests and experiences. Marriage itself tends to provide a greater pool of friends, but widows have difficulty in sustaining friendships in a couple oriented circle (Ferraro and Barresi, 1982:230).

In addition, Lopata (1973:183-218) found that the age of the widow was related to the degree of friendship involvement.

She found that widows between 65-74 years usually experienced a drop in friend relation which resulted in depression and loneliness, while widows 75 years and older were much more active in friend relations and tended to benefit from this social interaction process. Lopata concluded that this difference of interaction was attributable to the fact that younger widows are most likely attached to a social circle in which most of the age peers are still married and in which they feel like a "third wheel." But in the 75+ age category, most women can almost expect to be widowed and thus are more likely to socialize with other widows of the same age, thereby allowing for a sense of group consciousness.

Blau (1973:50-65; 1981) tells that the number of social roles a woman plays when widowed are more likely to indicate that there are other people who need her because she has services to offer that someone else considers worthwhile. This, in turn, reinforces her sense of self-worth and gives her a new social identity.

While lower educated widows may engage in friendships that are based on "neighbouring" and social interaction with kin, their higher educated counterparts engage in activities that they consider purposeful, such as volunteer work; intellectually stimulating, such as concert and theatre performances or that demand greater financial flexibility such as travelling.

The above review of literature seems to indicate that research into widowhood has produced a body of findings on which there is considerable consensus. Nevertheless, there are some variables which various studies have identified in relation to this topic where research evidence is more ambiguous and inconclusive.

Some studies on residential living arrangements as support systems during widowhood show inconsistent results. Hochschild (1973), for instance, observed extensive contact and support among widows in an apartment complex for the aged, reporting that the availability of neighbours in such a setting increased the amount of social interaction and encouraged a sense of self-validation. Research on other retirement community settings does not support such a finding, stating that factors such as size, that is the number of residences, and ethnic/racial make-up of residents must be taken into account, and these may modify the above conclusion (Jacobs, 1974;1975).

Similarly, income and ethnicity are further examples that demonstrate the inconclusiveness of present findings. According to Lopata and Brehm (1986) income as a variable of social support has ramifications on life quality in widowhood. Yet, to what extent the availability or absence of income impinges on such factors as financial dependence and/or poverty is still a nebulous area of research.

For example, in Canada in 1979, the majority - 66 percent - of all widows over 65 years of age was officially declared poor because they lived below the official poverty standards (National Council of Welfare, 1979:31; Baker, 1979:20-31). Poor or near poverty according to Binstock (1983:136-141) is measured, for the purpose of governmental statistics, by comparing a person's income to a nationally fixed poverty line. If one manages to fall above this arbitrary dollar line, one is considered marginally well off, if one falls below it, one is, statistically speaking, poor.

Research which follows the above mentioned measurement methods for poverty and financial dependence guidelines tends to overlook the research subjects. This writer contends that financial well-being is not solely defined by an individual's measurable income but also by the meaning that it holds for the recipient, a matter which so far has been sparsely researched.

The feeling of financial dependence or independence is also discussed by Eichler (1983:204; Baker, 1984:129-42) who point out that a widow's perception of dependence is irrevocably tied to her past life style, for instance whether or not she has been employed or is benefitting from pension plan payments and so forth, in other words, structural or situational conditions.

According to Baker (1984), the old widows of today have experienced world wars and economic depression, and precisely



those events influence the fear of being destitute or institutionalized in old age and consequently give rise to saving and economizing throughout one's productive years. She found that only very frail women lived with family members or were temporarily institutionalized and therefore were dependent.

Overall, she identifies geographic proximity as a means by which intimate interaction and caretaking can be encouraged and the dependency factor reduced.

"Meaningful family linkages do not require living in the same household but do require a network involving productive exchanges of reciprocal benefits for all family members. Contact and relationships at discrete times may be preferable to continuous face to face interaction. Quality of relationship is the issue here,..." (Sussman, 1985:421)

Lee (1981) found that there is a strong connection between fears of ill health and poverty and the fear of dependence on children, on kin or on friends. However, she contends that the fear of poverty is in many cases not attributable to old age whereas the fear of poor health may be so.

"There are many poor old people; but there are still many young poor people too. And most of the people who are old and poor were poor before they were old,..." (Lee, 1981:366)

Finally, a review of the ethnic factor in the family literature shows that it is recognized in general to be an important factor in shaping structure and process. Therefore

ethnicity has impact on child-rearing practices, orientation to marriage and family interaction in old age and consequently must be assumed as having an impact on widowhood as well (Baker, 1984:63-64, 129-161). Bengston (1979:11-12) points out that:

"It should be obvious that any attempt to develop social policy for the aged which ignores the great range of cultural and social variation in the human experience runs the risk of mistakenly inferring universal and causal connections between the biological events of aging and the consequences of growing older in a pluralistic society."

Although ethnicity in an abstract way is included in most studies, its operational definitions seem to vary from case to case and consequently the results are not generally conclusive. Woehrer (1978:330) comments that research on ethnic families, particularly on families of European origin, is very limited.

Instead, studies tend to compare families across racial lines, (black/white) or religious lines (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish) (Jackson, 1985:264-92). This approach still fails to address the actual factor of ethnicity (Woehrer, 1978:337; Gelfand and Olsen, 1979:206-220; Cantor, 1979:153-173). It may also be noted that while these studies address old age in general, none were specifically directed at widowhood.

However, one recent study has suggested that foreign born European widows were more intent on living alone and tended to have a more pronounced sense of independence than North American born women (Wan, 1985:156-63). This study failed to

further investigate the reasons or the circumstances of this occurrence and thus begs for more exploration.

In general, the findings of this literature are based predominantly on quantitative analysis of large survey samples that examine correlations between such variables as age, education, occupation, income, health, ethnicity and their effect on widowhood. Length of widowhood as well as interaction process with family and friends<sup>8</sup> are acknowledged as influential factors in the adjustment to and quality of widowhood.

Therefore, one may summarize as follows: Widows were ~~found to~~ have overall lower life quality when income was low, when role repertoires were limited, when they felt useless and when family and friend interaction was low. Life quality was high when family relationships were based on shared interests, mutual needs and exchanges that contributed significantly to a higher sense of self-esteem and a person's sense of usefulness. Interaction varied according to what people wanted to derive from relationships and expectations and behaviour varied across ethnic, racial and class boundaries.

There is also consensus in research that class, education and husband's occupation influence the extent of friendship in widowhood. Furthermore, sufficient evidence suggests that most widows redirect their friendship patterns from couple oriented circles to relationships that involve other widows or single persons.

Overall, widows rate family and friends highly and most supportive during the initial time of bereavement. The support was mostly expressed in emotional support. At a later time in widowhood the emotional support was transformed to social support, especially in friendships, and manifested ~~itself~~ in interaction in leisure activities, work and other domains. One might say that the widow made a new life for herself. In contrast, friendships are least frequent and least important as support systems for the least educated and most disadvantaged widows.

While quantitative research can point out variations and similarities within structural dimensions of social phenomena it nevertheless fails to explain the process that leads to these variations or similarities. The thrust of the critical argument therefore directs itself towards the body of research that fails to take into account the central actor of the study, namely the widow. This writer thinks that a historical study from a life course perspective offers a more integrative approach between the individual and his/her social world over time.

By studying family relationships in terms of cohorts and in terms of inter-generational relations one is allowed an insight into how individual lives are shaped, how social change occurs and how family ties are maintained over time.

As in the case of this study, a widow's life history is by its very nature also a historical approach, for it

"...presents an interaction of three types of time and change: individual time, family time and historical time" (Hagestad, 1981:11).

Hareven (1981:142-44) writes that the adaptation of individuals to the social and economic conditions they face when they reach old age is contingent on the circumstances by which they reach their senior status.

Differences and variations in individual backgrounds, particularly the manner in which socialization and cultural heritage have shaped their views of family ties and their expectations of support from kin and social institutions, are thus theoretically crucial in determining their adaptability to the life stage called widowhood.

Therefore it may be posited that the cumulative life history of the woman and the specific historical conditions at earlier points in time shape status and self-concept in later life. As such, adaptation to widowhood is a study of integration of time and change. As Hareven (1981:149) points out:

"...the social experience of each cohort is influenced not only by the external conditions at a particular point in time when it reaches 'old age' but also by its earlier life experience as it was shaped by historical conditions at earlier points in time."

Thus, the individual accounts for meaning about his/her social world which is shaped by structure as well as process. In this sense, social values, social roles and group membership provide the ties that reciprocally relate the

person to society (Rosow, 1974, 1985; Stryker and Statham 1985).

Hence Symbolic Interactionism is the most powerful theoretical tool through which the life history of an old person can be explained. According to Blumer (1969:2-6) Symbolic Interaction explains the nature of human group life or human society by three basic principles:

- 1) Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
- 2) These meanings are the product of social interaction in human society.
- 3) These meanings are modified and handled through an interpretive process that is used by each individual in dealing with the things he/she encounters.

During this process of interaction and interpretation such factors as social position, social roles and cultural prescriptions, as well as attitudes, perceptions and cognitions account for various forms of human behaviour.

While social roles and social positions may have different meanings for different people, roles and positions (statuses) are part of the societal system and the meanings they have for individuals are incorporated in the culture of a society and passed on through the socialization process (Stryker and Statham, 1985:341). Therefore, if Symbolic Interactionism is supplemented by Role Theory it can provide a more elaborate explanation for human group life within social

structures, in this case, the phenomenon of widowhood and its linkage to social structure.

Perhaps the following example will illustrate our point. Widowhood represents the loss of a socially important status. Although this loss can happen to both men and women it is more likely to happen to women because they most often outlive men. In both cases, technically, in widowhood the loss reflects the key role of wife or husband (Northcott, 1984).

For females 65 years and over in this society, the core identity is still considered to be that of wife and mother. Therefore, with the loss of the husband and possibly the exit of children from the home at an earlier time, the woman is no longer actively engaged either in the wife or the mother role. Subsequently, she will have to redefine her identity and her role and adjust her behaviour accordingly. Social support systems, such as family and friends may operate as important elements in the identification of new roles and a changing self-concept.

Hence, the theory for this analysis should explain both the conceptual workings of social role and the social self and the meanings these concepts hold for those women who are now widows.

While widows have held the position of wife, probably mother and possibly friend, they have not all experienced this role in the same manner. Consequently, if being a widow is defined as a social role, that is, a conventional expectation

that provides the structural framework for self-identity and behaviour only to be assumed after the role of wife has been relinquished, then, according to this formulation, a social rôle is a set of functionally interdependent patterned relations between the social person and the participants in his or her social circle and refers to duties and privileges he or she is granted through them (Merton, 1957). The social person is an interactional one, both actor and reactor, one that perceives and is perceived and through this process reflects others perception onto self (Meltzer et al, 1980; Charon, 1985).

In Symbolic Interactionism the concept of role is one that builds "down" to the social person and in Role Theory the concept of role builds "up" from interaction "to larger units of organized social life" (Stryker and Statham, 1985:344).

In this sense role is the concept that bridges social person and social structure. When researching widowhood it is therefore necessary to remember that

"...societies are differentiated entities and consequently that only certain persons interact in certain ways with certain resources in certain settings....If self reflects society and if society is highly differentiated, so must be the self....Persons have as many identities as they have different sets of structured relationships with others" (Stryker and Statham, 1985:345).

The social person in his or her evaluation of social support systems on adjustment processes and self-concept overall inescapably makes subjective judgements. These



judgements, which are grounded in personal experience, are arrived at through a cognitive process of self-perception and interpretation in which the widow perceives herself as an object.

The following may serve as an example: while the widow during the initial period of her husband's death still views herself as a wife, others see her as a woman who has lost this role. The widow has lost a position and sometimes even prestige since these are derived through her husband. This loss may result in diminished self-concept and slow adjustment to her new status.

"From the standpoint of the interactionist it is the symbolic impingement of the past, as well as the future, on the present that is important" (Spence, 1986:116).

Only the widow's interpretation from the present situation, reflecting on the past and adjusting to the future, will define her situation as real to herself. Whatever situation is defined as real will be real in its consequences. An example will demonstrate this point. In Canada, an older couple will usually associate with other older couples in leisure oriented activities. However, when the woman becomes a widow, the couple oriented reality does not exist anymore. Her reality is that of a single-oriented person and the consequences are that she will be phased out of a couple-oriented circle and perhaps find her new reality in a circle that consists mostly of widows.

According to Stebbins (1969) most of our definitions of the numerous situations that we encounter each day belong to one of the following categories: a) cultural definitions, b) habitual personal definitions and c) unique personal definitions.

In the first instance, a widow is culturally defined as a person whose husband had died. This definition is consensually shared by all members of such a group and the society in which they live.

Habitual personal definitions refer to the circumstances in which the same situation, for instance, being a widow, holds the same core meaning for all members of this social category but the behaviour and the interaction that result from it may be differentially experienced by individual participants depending on the culture of the wider society of which they are a part. The afore-going example of couple oriented activities prior to widowhood and widow oriented affiliation after widowhood can be classified as a habitual personal definition since in other societies, i.e., India or China, widows are more closely affiliated with the extended family.

Unique personal definitions refer to a person's interpretations of situations that are extremely individualized experiences and are not generally encountered by the group as a whole.

Stebbins (1969) theoretical explanation of situational definitions can serve as a guide in actual interview situations in which one can establish from what definition the respondent defines her situation. Through the definition of the situation role-taking and role-making take place, not in an abstract manner, but in specific contexts of interaction processes. In a similar vein, Hewitt (1976:106) states:

"And self - whether as an object of the moment or of cumulative experience - is constituted in the "here and now" by the individual and others. In short, it might be said, human conduct is situated and cannot really be comprehended apart from the actual context in which it occurs."

The situation emphasizes both the spatial and the temporal order. It is in this time frame in which the widow's situation becomes meaningful. The effect of role-taking and role-making lies in the interpretation of new situations and the control which the individual is able to exercise over his or her own response (Mead, 1934:254).

Role-taking means that people share one another's perspective within a particular social circle or social situation. For instance, the experience of a family is shaped by one's position within its network of relationships and specific behaviour is expected from different members. But if the situation of the family should change, for example through the death of the husband, the widow's position within the network changes and, from the perspective of the other actors

in the system, she should, ideally, redefine her role and her behaviour.

According to Hewitt (1976:54-55) role-taking also implies role-making. While taking the role of the other one also simultaneously decides whether such a role should be realigned to accommodate one's own role performance, thus making a new role to fit an emerging situation. While role-taking implies a sense of conformity to established regulations (traditions) and norms, role-making implies a sense of process, action, decision making, in which self become the primary referent. The effect of role-taking and role-making lies in the control which the individual is able to exercise over his or her own response (Mead, 1934:254; Turner, 1962:20-40).

The definition of the situation through which role-taking and role-making emerge involves not only reflexive thinking but also cognition of emergent acts and subsequent decision making.

From this perspective the widow experiences her reality as individual through social acts, past and present, such as her role involvement with husband and children, her role as housewife, and the like. Through reflexivity and the emergence of new situations the widow becomes self-conscious about her own reality, how it was, how it is and, perhaps, how she would like it to be. Reflexivity creates an awareness of social processes and one's reaction to these processes and to others participating in these processes with her. Hence,

Symbolic Interactionism re-evaluates an individual's placement within a historical context as has been discussed earlier.

In widowhood, role-making behaviour, as suggested earlier, is often limited by rigid role boundaries. Age, health and lifestyle prior to widowhood can set severe limitations on role-making. Thus, adjustment processes and life quality can be enhanced or decreased through role-making or role-taking behaviour.

As such, in role transition inherent in widowhood, the primary referent is always the actor. While before widowhood role transitions socially define or redefine a person (spinster to wife, low class to middle class) and publicly symbolize status change, these role transitions also facilitate social movement among groups or within groups (Merton, 1957). With the onset of widowhood this transition from wife to widow therefore theoretically impinges on social gains, social position, identity and acknowledgement by reference groups.

In conclusion one can say that Symbolic Interactionism is a useful perspective for the examination of social support systems and their effect on adaptation during widowhood. But this perspective additionally encourages an analysis of the extent to which history and culture have influenced a woman's adjustment to widowhood.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

#### Questionnaire Design and Interview Method

A clinical interview, also referred to as the personal history interview (Baily, 1982:320-21; Denzin, 1978:13), was judged to be the most appropriate method of data collection in this type of study. The clinical interview is conducted along the lines of a focussed interview in which the questions asked are of a semi-structured nature. This is to say that the interviewer selects a specific topic in a person's life history towards which the questions will be directed and that the topic therefore stipulates the content of the questions to be asked. Also, according to Babbie (1973), Kahn and Connell (1957) and Festinger and Katz (1966), the response rate tends to be better when the interviewer is present. In such a case, nonverbal behaviour can be observed; the validity and reliability of the respondents answers can be assessed; control can be maintained over question order to ensure that questions are not answered out of order; the environment can be standardized to ensure that privacy is attained and that questions are answered alone without receiving prompting or answers from others; and the time, date and place of the interview can be recorded in the event that further information is required. Also, this type of interview allows the researcher the opportunity to repeat the question when the response indicates the respondent misunderstood it and allows

the interviewer to probe for more specific answers. Finally, the interview can be recorded on tape for future use in analyzing the information taken during the interview.

In addition the personal history interview allows the interviewer to ask a series of structured questions relating to the respondent's demographic characteristics, as shown in Appendix A. Demographic information pertaining to a person's life history can then be tied to longitudinal dimensions along the life course, which in this study reflects aspects of the family life cycle and its roles as well as the transitions and losses associated with it (Kahn and Antonucci, 1981:385-403; Cherlin, 1983:5-20; Lopata, 1972:275-302). An example of the family life chart is shown in Appendix B. This type of organizational chart is helpful for the following reasons: first, the chart will serve as a spatial and temporal guide in making each stage in the family life cycle equally important in its relation to structural conditions and individual interpretation of events and behaviour. Secondly, it may illustrate how present interpretations of situations and behaviour emerge from previous stages in the life cycle. Thirdly, questions relating to structural conditions can be asked and recorded at the start of each interview, being structured in design, leaving the personal history format as the last stage of the data collection process at which time the respondent has become more familiar with the life cycle guideline.

While this kind of interview was considered the most appropriate form of investigation, it nevertheless can pose some problems. As the subjects were to be widows between the ages of 70-82 years, the following difficulties might be encountered: ability to recall exact details of past events; fatigue due to the length of the interview and possible sensitivity to the subject matter. As a pretest, the questionnaire and subsequent interview were conducted with one subject. On the basis of that experience, no changes were made in the construction of the questionnaire or the sequences of stages in the family life cycle chart relating to the interview. However, during the subsequent interviews it became apparent that the respondents did not follow the sequential stages in the family cycle as outlined in Appendix B. It became necessary to reclassify the family life cycle into fewer stages. An elaboration of this will be discussed in the section on administration of questionnaire and interview.

#### Sample Selection

The cases for this study consist of two groups of women who had been widowed for a minimum period of two years; their age ranged for 70-82 years. Each group of widows totalled ten. One group was selected from a Protestant Lutheran Congregation in Windsor and were of German descent. The other group was drawn from members of the Windsor Jewish Community. The total group consisted of women who were European born



Germans, European born Jews, and Canadian born individuals of German and Jewish descent. A purposive sample technique was employed whereby the German sample was preselected by a liaison person from the Lutheran church and the majority of Jewish widows by one liaison person affiliated with the Jewish Community Center and Peretz House and another outside source. The question of generalization from data collected from this small group will be discussed later.

#### Administration of Questionnaire and Interview

The purpose of the study was explained in general terms to subjects by the liaison persons involved. A list of potential volunteer participants and their telephone numbers was provided to the researcher. Telephone contact was then made by the researcher, during which a brief introduction and review of the project was given and a direct request for their participation was made. With participants who were willing to cooperate in the study, a mutually agreeable interview time and date was established at the close of the telephone conversation. However, a number of the German widows who had offered their names to the liaison person for participation in the project, declined to participate when they were contacted by the researcher. Follow-up telephone calls were made by the interviewer in an effort to change their mind and to solicit their assistance. After three refusals their name was eliminated from the list and additional assistance was sought from the church liaison person in locating another

participant to fulfill the desired quota of ten. There was no difficulty in attaining the desired quota of Jewish participants and none of the named persons submitted by the liaison person refused when contacted by the interviewer.

All of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants, which was either an apartment or a single family dwelling. Where possible, the interviewer sat at a dining room or kitchen table facing the subject. Other interviews were conducted in the living room where seating was arranged in such a manner that eye contact with the subject was maintained.

The interviews were conducted over a thirty day period spanning May and June of 1988. The interview time ranged from forty-five minutes to three hours. The average interview lasted one hour and fifty minutes. Each interview was recorded on audio tape with permission from each participant. The demographic questions, as shown in Appendix A, were read to the subject and the answers were recorded by the interviewer. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher asked the respondent, if at all possible, to limit the answers to the specific questions asked and reserve any elaboration for the second part of the interview, that is the clinical interview. Of the twenty interviews conducted thirteen were in English, five in German and the remaining two in a combination of English and German.

The demographic data, on one hand, presents frequency distributions of such variables, among others, as age, length of widowhood, education, occupations, income and membership association. On the other hand, and perhaps more significantly, it allows us to point out variations within the structural dimensions over the life course and furthermore, in conjunction with the findings of the life history interview, to be discussed later on in this chapter, it demonstrates to what extent a range of variability exists in widowhood as identified by types, patterns and lifestyles.

As part of the clinical interview, answers to the life course history within the framework of the family life cycle were elicited by using probing questions pertaining to past and present events, past and present role involvement and the achievement, satisfaction and self concept gained from these roles. Although the interview was recorded in total, notes were made at the end of the session of recurring themes, for instance, possession/dispossession, dependence/independence, trust/distrust, stability/change; recurring types, for example active/passive or optimistic/fatalistic; lifestyles, that is the adjustment to life by similarly situated persons due to their location in an economic system or in a historical-political system, such as women and jobs, Depression and jobs, post World War II refugee and immigration. These notes were later used in the analysis of the life history data and will be referred to in the next chapter.

Although the questionnaire and interview had been pretested, some clarification and elaboration was nevertheless necessary in several instances. A discussion of these will follow later on in this section. Also while conducting the pretest no difficulties were experienced with probing questions relating to the family life cycle, it became obvious in subsequent interviews that respondents did not relate life experiences, roles and events to the stages of the family life cycle in the sequence originally designed for use in this study. A modified version with fewer life stages was employed by the researcher for the majority of the interviews. This version of the family life cycle can be seen in Appendix C.

The demographic questions required further explanation or elaboration include questions 10, 20, 29, 32 and 35. Question 10 and 20 pertain to education and asked the respondent the number of years of formal schooling for self and spouse. Subjects had difficulty in interpreting two of the seven choices given for this question. One option referred to vocational training or apprenticeship, the other choice referred to the "other" category.

The researcher clarified this issue by giving examples of vocational training courses such as secretarial courses or apprenticeship programmes offered for plumbers or electricians. However, their answers indicated that such programmes were usually enrolled in during adolescence as a

means of learning a trade and to become employable. Enrollment in such programmes was not contingent upon completion of a particular grade in school. Thus vocational training could not be considered as a higher level of education than any of the other aforementioned choices. For only three subjects did grade 11, 12 and 13 and constitute a prerequisite for more advanced academic instruction, such as an Ontario Teaching Certificate, registered nursing degree and a three year business degree. The problem was resolved by disregarding the category of "vocational training" and "other" in the demographic questionnaire. Instead, information pertaining to these categories was sought during the course of the life history interview, when necessary.

Question 29 referred to the respondent's number of grandchildren. It became apparent that those widows who had few grandchildren, for instance between one and six, were able to give the exact number of grandchildren; those who had more than six were less sure of the exact number and would provide an estimated guess, for example, one widow would estimate 18 or more grandchildren. Therefore, this question is only of limited validity but will be referred to during the discussion. Question 32 concerned the subject's health regarding illness and hospitalization since age 55, 65, and during the last year. The majority of women were unable to recall exact numbers of hospitalizations and illnesses since either age 65 or 55. They were, however, aware of major

medical problems that they had encountered over time yet remained unable to connect them to a specific age. Because of this vagueness it was decided to omit this part of the question. Question 35 asked subjects to evaluate their present financial situation, ranging from poor to fairly wealthy. Respondents experienced problems in defining the meaning to the choices given. In answering the question the respondent usually provided an example of what her choice of her present financial situation meant to her in real terms. The researcher then repeated the answer in relation to one of the choices offered and recorded it. Those subjects that were inclined to choose the category "fairly wealthy" preferred to have their choice recorded as "very well off," "quite well off" or "rather well off."

#### Reliability and Validity

As mentioned beforehand, there were no problems with the questionnaire-interview during the pretest and therefore subsequent interviews were conducted as originally designed. Contrary to the earlier experience, however, some subjects did experience some problems in comprehension of some of the demographic questions. These problems were resolved satisfactorily by instructions from the researcher.

The demographic portion of the interview schedule was designed using a structured interview format. This served as a basis for objective data collection. The life-history section of the interview schedule allowed for confirmation,

elaboration, and exploration of the information ascertained through the objective questions, thereby resolving any inconsistencies in the recorded data or vice versa. Thus, this method served as a cross-checking device.

For those subjects with whom interviews were conducted in German, the choice of their native language facilitated comprehension and expression of both questions and answers.

As has been mentioned beforehand, there was some difficulty in obtaining participation consent from the German women. Even at the time of each interview the researcher became aware of some hesitation on the part of these widows. Therefore, to set the stage for a less tense atmosphere each widow was again assured that the first part of the interview was an ordinary type of questionnaire; confidentiality was once more emphasized and the subject was again reminded that participation was voluntary and therefore the interview could be terminated at any time. This approach reinforced credibility in the interviewer and the project at hand. This writer believes that the nature of the non-threatening format of the questionnaire contributed towards a less tense atmosphere for the duration of the entire interview.

Subsequently all subjects were co-operative in granting permission to be interviewed, and in many cases, extended their hospitality to the researcher by way of refreshments. At this time the majority of widows would point to or show family photographs to the interviewer.

In most instances the respondents expressed an interest in the subject matter of the study and felt that they had something to contribute. This, in turn generated co-operation and interest in the project, and by all appearances they answered the questions to the best of their knowledge. Consequently, the data in this study are considered by the researcher sufficiently valid and reliable.

Towards the end of each interview, all German widows admitted that they had not considered themselves sufficiently worthwhile to make any contribution to a research project; they did not believe that old people with little education and insignificant job skills were of any interest to anyone. One may suggest that their fear of participation is fueled by the thought of inadequacy, in other words, by low self-esteem and an almost intrinsic distrust of strangers.

In contrast to the German women's reluctance to participate the Jewish widows were not only pleased to participate but also emphasized their uniqueness of individual experiences and importance. They felt self-confident and considered their contribution as worthwhile.



## CHAPTER IV

### Demographic Data

The following pages report the demographic data for the two groups of widows. All tables in this section are presented in frequency distributions. Tables 1, 2 and 3 give a description of the sample's age distribution, age of widowhood and length of widowhood. It becomes evident that the majority of German widows is 75 and older, with only two women being under the age of 74 years, while six of the Jewish widows are 74 years or younger, the remainder belonging to the 75 to 80+ age group. However, the average age for German widows is 75.8 years, for Jewish widows 74.6 and the mean age for the total sample is 75.2 years, which renders this sample a very homogeneous age group.

Of all widows, five German and six Jewish women (55 percent) became widowed between 65 and 74 years of age. Four German and three Jewish women (35 percent) were under 64 years when widowed and one woman from each group (10 percent) was 35 years old at widowhood.

Table 3 shows that the entire sample is evenly divided regarding widows' length of widowhood. Seven of the twenty women are widowed five years or less, while four others experience widowhood between six and ten years. Of the remaining nine widows, two lost their husbands eleven to twenty years ago, four between 21-30 years ago and the remaining three have been widows from 31 to 45 years. This

table shows that 35 percent of the women are experiencing widowhood for a very long time that ranges anywhere between 20 and 45 years. Another 35 percent are widowed five years or less and the remaining 30 percent have lost their husbands six to nineteen years ago.

Table 1: Age of Widow by Ethnicity and Country of Origin

Age In Years	German		Jewish		N=20
	European Born	Canadian Born	European Born	Canadian Born	
70			1	1	
71		1			
72	1			1	
73					
74			2	1	
75	4			1	
76					
77	1				
78				1	
79	1	1	1		
80	1				
81					
82				1	
Total	8	2	4	6	20

Table 2: Age at Widowhood by Ethnicity and Country of Origin

Age In Years	German		Jewish		N=20
	European Born	Canadian Born	European Born	Canadian Born	
Under 40	1			1	
40-44				1 <sup>1</sup>	
45-49	2				
50-54	1		1		
55-59	1				
60-64			1		
65-69	2	1	1	1	
70-74	1	1	1	3	
75+					
Total	8	2	4	6	20

<sup>1</sup>Note this subject remarried and was also widowed a second time at age 52. The datum reflects only her age at first widowhood.

Table 3: Length of Widowhood by Ethnicity

Length of Widowhood In Years	German	Jewish	N=20
1 - 5	3	4	
6 - 10	2	2	
11 - 20	1	1	
21 - 30	2	2	
31 - 40	1	1	
41+	1	-	
Total	10	10	20

Table 4 shows a frequency distribution of husband's age at death by group membership. Of ten German husbands, four died between 50 and 59 years of age, one man died in his sixties and a further four died between 70 and 79 years. One husband's age of death is unknown.

In the Jewish sample six out of ten husbands died between 70 and 80+ years, two died in their sixties, one in his fifties and the remaining one died under the age of 49 years. The mean age of husband's death for the German group is 57.4 years while for the Jewish sample it is 66.9 years.

Table 5 reflects the total distribution of cause of husband's death as defined by the following categories: sudden death, death after long illness, unexpected death while hospitalized and unknown. Eleven of all husbands died suddenly, six succumbed after a long illness and two died unexpectedly while hospitalized. One cause of death is unknown.

When the data of Table 4 is compared it becomes clear that the husbands of Jewish widows outlived those of German widows by 9.5 years. Consequently, Jewish widows were married for a longer period of time than German ones, with Jewish marriages lasting an average of 38.8 years compared to German marriages of 31.4 years. These figures are computed by subtracting age at marriage from age at widowhood.

However, while Jewish husbands outlived German ones, there is no explanation why they did so. What is remarkable

for this small sample is the fact that thirteen out of nineteen husbands died suddenly and/or unexpectedly as is shown in Table 5. By allowing for one unknown cause of death, in only six cases was death eventually foreseen due to the nature of the illness.

Table 4: Husband's Age at Death by Ethnicity

Age At Death In Years	German	Jewish	N=20
Under 49		1	
50 - 59	4	1	
60 - 69	1	2	
70 - 79	4	5	
80 - 89		1	
Unknown <sup>1</sup>	1		
Total	10	10	20

<sup>1</sup>Note this husband became missing in action during World War II and was declared dead after the war.

Table 5: Cause of Husband's Death For Total Sample

Cause of Death		N=20
Death Occurred Suddenly	11	
After a Long Illness	6	
Unexpectedly While Hospitalized	2	
Unknown	1	
Total	20	20



The next variable of concern is place of birth and date of immigration to Canada. While only the date of immigration will be presented in table format, it is nevertheless necessary to elaborate on the birth place of foreign born widows and their deceased spouses.

In this sample eight widows are Canadian born of which two are of German and six of Jewish background. Among the deceased husbands, six were Canadian born, two being of German and four of Jewish background. Therefore, the frequency distribution represents only the information obtained from the foreign born sample.

All European born German widows are ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsch) from south-eastern Europe. Of these, six were born in Yugoslavia, one in Russia and one in Czechoslovakia. All foreign born Jewish widows came from Poland.

Of the European born German husbands, now deceased, seven were ethnic Germans from Yugoslavia and Romania, one man was from East Prussia and considered "Reichsdeutsch," a description used for people born in what was considered Germany proper (the German Reich), as will be discussed more fully later.

Of the Jewish husbands, now deceased, two each came from Poland and Russia, one was British born and one was American.

As one can see from Table 6 the bulk of Germans (seven) arrived in Canada between 1946 and 1955 with only one entry occurring during the early thirties. On the other hand, the

majority of Jewish women (three) landed in Canada between 1920 and 1930, with only one post war arrival prior to 1950.

For the widows' deceased husbands the data is reflected in Table 7 in the following manner. With one case missing from the German total (eight) due to being declared dead after World War II, the major thrust of immigration occurred in the postwar period between 1946 and 1955, with one immigration entry prior to 1930. In comparison, the Jewish men (four) arrived in Canada between 1920 and 1930 with one entry prior to 1920 and one other immigration in post war time prior to 1950.

Table 6: Widow's Date of Immigration by Year and Ethnic Background

Year Of Immigration	German	Jewish	N=12
1925 and Before		1	
1926 - 1930		2	
1931 - 1935	1		
1936 - 1945			
1946 - 1950	3	1	
1951 - 1955	4		
1956 and Later			
Total	8	4	12

Table 7: Deceased Husband's Date of Immigration by Year and Ethnic Background

Year Of Immigration	German	Jewish	N=13
1920 and Before		1	
1921 - 1925		2	
1926 - 1930	1	2	
1931 - 1935			
1936 - 1945			
1946 - 1950	2	1	
1951 - 1955	4		
1956 and Later			
Total	7 <sup>1</sup>	6	13

<sup>1</sup>Note: One case missing due to death during World War II.

The following conclusion can be drawn from the above findings. All ethnic German women married ethnic German or German men. The majority of women (five) married men from the same region as themselves. Only those widows (three) who were married after the war chose husbands who came from a different country than their own. One of these marriages occurred prior to immigration, the other two took place in Canada.

All foreign born Jewish women (four) married Jewish men, two of whom came from Poland, one from Russia and one was Canadian. Only one woman was married prior to immigrating.

The next topic concerns the family of orientation. As will be recalled from the literature review, family, both extended and nuclear, is found to be an important variable in the assessment of social support during widowhood. Secondly, its function as a major socialization agent lays the foundation for the individual's self-concept, provides him or her with various roles and lastly, is instrumental in the provision of social status and possible access to societal rewards.

Tables 8 and 8a present a frequency distribution of the widow's siblings and the deceased husband's siblings described in total numbers and in numbers of presently living members by ethnicity and country of origin.

This table offers an insight into the size of European and Canadian families as they existed for this sample at the beginning of the twentieth century.

While it also allows for comparison of family size between the two ethnic groups it is unsuitable for comparison among same group members due to the over-representation, in one case, of European Germans, in the other case, of Canadian Jewish women and men.

However it does lend itself to further comparison by examining the family size of widow's own children in relation to the size of her or her late husband's family of orientation as will be shown in Table 9.

Table 8 shows that German widows grew up with an average of 3.2 siblings per family, representing a total of 32 brothers and/or sisters for the sample. Today thirteen of these siblings are still living and are distributed over eight widows.

In comparison, Jewish widows came from larger families, with an average of 4.1 siblings per family or 41 brothers and/or sisters distributed over the sample. Of these, 17 are alive today and distributed over seven widows. However, none of the sisters of European born widows are alive today.

The German widows' late husbands came from families with an average of 4.4 siblings, representing 44 children for the sample. Of those 23 are living today and are spread over eight in-law families.

In comparison, the families of Jewish widows' late husbands were smaller, averaging 3.9 siblings per family or 39

children per sample. Of those 16 are living and belong to seven in-law families.

If one inclines towards the argument that family support is important during widowhood, it becomes significant from these data that 59 percent of German widows' siblings and 47 percent of their late husbands' siblings are dead. In the Jewish sample the figures are comparable with 58 percent of the widows' and their late husbands' siblings deceased.

However, the percentage rate of deceased family members increases sharply for the European born Jewish widows and their late husbands. In this case, 85 percent of the widows' siblings and 65 percent of their late husbands' siblings are deceased. Considering the high percentage of deceased siblings and in-laws, these findings already put into question demographically the importance of kin family as social support system in widows of old age.

Table 9 is a presentation of number, gender and marital status of children born to German and Jewish widows. It is necessary at this point to make the reader aware that only eight out of ten German women bore children. However, additionally one woman had a stepdaughter who is treated as a daughter in the distribution of the sample. All Jewish subjects, on the other hand, bore children.

It becomes clear from the sample's distribution that the average German household had 1.7 children compared to 2.0 children in the Jewish family. This translates into seventeen

children for the German and twenty children for the Jewish sample.

When comparing the widow's family of orientation with her family of procreation, it is evident that within one generation the number of births per family has been drastically reduced. In fact, the birth rate for children born to German widows falls below the reproduction level while it is maintained in Jewish families.

The majority of children, twelve in the German and sixteen in the Jewish group, are married, one in each group is divorced/separated, one German and two Jewish child(ren) is/are single, one German is widowed and two German and one Jewish person(s) is/are deceased.

If, as the literature states, widows derive a large proportion of emotional support and assistance in the management of daily affairs from their own children especially during the time following bereavement, then such a claim begs an inquiry into location of residence of children to establish to what extent propinquity furthers familial interaction in this sample.

Table 10 concerns itself with the distribution of widow's children by gender and ethnic background in relation to residential location as measured by driving distance in hours from Windsor.

Initially, place of residence was recorded by the actual name of city, province, state and country in which son or



daughter resided. By establishing mileage from Windsor and dividing it by allowed highway speed, an approximate hourly driving distance was computed.

As is shown in the table, thirteen of fifteen surviving children (eight sons and five daughters) of German background live locally or within one hour's drive from their mother's residence. The remaining two children live between ten and twenty or even more hours away. Of nineteen surviving children in the Jewish group, thirteen (five sons and eight daughters) live in the Windsor area or within an hour from the city. Four others live five hours and the remaining two up to ten hours driving time away.

Table 8: Widow's Siblings as Described in Total Numbers and Living Today by Ethnicity and Country of Origin

Case Number	German				Jewish				N=20
	European Born		Canadian Born		European Born		Canadian Born		
	Bros.	Sis.	Bros.	Sis.	Bros.	Sis.	Bros.	Sis.	
	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	
1	1 <sup>1</sup>	(1) <sup>2</sup>			2(2)	3			
2	2	(1)	1(1)		3	4			
3			3(3)		5(1)	3			
4			2(2)		1				
5	1	1					3(1)	3(2)	
6	4	3					3(1)	1(1)	
7	1	1(1)						1	
8	3	(1)					3(2)		
9				5(1) 2			1(1)	1(1)	
10				1(1) 1			2(2)	3(3)	
Totals	12	(3)	11(7)	6(2) 3	11(3)	10	12(7)	9(7)	20

<sup>1</sup>Total

<sup>2</sup>Living Today

Table 8a: Husband's Siblings as Described in Total Numbers and Living Today by Ethnicity and Country of Origin

Case Number	German				Jewish				N=20
	European Born		Canadian Born		European Born		Canadian Born		
	Bros.	Sis.	Bros.	Sis.	Bros.	Sis.	Bros.	Sis.	
	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	
1	1	1 <sup>1</sup> (1) <sup>2</sup>			3	1			
2	2	1			2(2)	2			
3	1	4			1	2			
4	1(1)	3 (2)			2(1)	2(2)			
5		2 (1)			1	3(1)			
6	3(1)				3(2)	1			
7	4(2)	2 (1)					1	5	
8	2	3 (3)						2(1)	
9			4(2)	3(2)			1(1)	4(4)	
10			3(3)	4(4)			2(1)	1(1)	
Totals	14(4)	6 (8)	7(5)	7(6)	12(5)	11(3)	4(2)	12(6)	20

<sup>1</sup>Total

<sup>2</sup>Living Today

✓  
Table 9: Number of Children Born to Widows by Ethnicity and Gender

Gender	German	Jewish
Male	11	10
Female	6	10
Total	17	20

Table 9a: Marital Status of Children Born to Widows by Ethnicity

Marital Status	German	Jewish
Single	1	2
Married	12	16 <sup>1</sup>
Divorced or Separated	1	1
Widowed	1	
Deceased	2	1
Total	17	20

<sup>1</sup>Note: This includes one common-law marriage.

Table 10: Distribution of Widow's Children by Gender and Ethnic Background in Relation to Residential Location As Measured by Driving Distance in Hours

Place of Residence	German Widows'		Jewish Widows' N=34	
	Sons	Daughters	Sons	Daughters
Local	7	8	4	5
One Hour From Windsor	1		1	3
Up to Five Hours			3	1
Up to Ten Hours	1		1	1
Up to Twenty or More Hours		1		
Total	9	6	9	10

As will be recalled, there is consensus in the literature that education, occupation and income are strongly related and shape to what extent economic, physical and social well-being are experienced by widows. The following pages will thus describe findings that relate to questions on education and these will be followed by data on occupation and income.

By examining Tables 11 and 11a, which show a frequency distribution for educational background in terms of highest school grade achieved for widows and widows' deceased husbands by ethnicity and country of origin, it is obvious that the German widows and their deceased husbands have an overall lower level of education than their Jewish counterparts. In particular, the distribution shows that seven of the European born German widows have less than seven years of education, while the remaining widow attained high school level.

In comparison, the achieved grade level of European born Jewish widows ranged from less than seven years for one widow, which actually reflects no formal education at all, to University level for another, with two respondents falling into the eight to eleven grade levels. Of the six Canadian born Jewish women, five went to high school with two receiving their diploma. The remaining respondent had eight to nine years of schooling.

When examining the distribution of deceased husbands' education it shows that none of German husbands had more than eight to nine years of formal education but five had less than

seven years of schooling, including one case representing no formal education.

The grade level for deceased Jewish husbands could only be ascertained for nine subjects due to lack of knowledge by one respondent. The attained grade level ranged from eight to nine years for two European Jewish husbands to university for one man from each group. Of the remaining five subjects four were high school graduates.

Thus, the highest levels of education were attained by the majority of Jewish deceased husbands while the majority of German widows were the least educated in the sample.

Table 11: Educational Background in Terms of Highest School Grade Achieved for Widows by Ethnicity and Country of Origin

Highest Grade In Years	German European Born	Canadian Born	Jewish European Born	Canadian Born	N=20
7 Years Or Less	7		1 <sup>1</sup>		
8 - 9		2	1	1	
10 - 11	1		1	3	
12 - 13				2	
University			1		
Total	8	2	4	6	20

<sup>1</sup>This value represents no formal education.



Table 11a: Educational Background in Terms of Highest School Grade Achieved for Deceased Husband by Ethnicity and Country of Origin

Highest Grade In Years	German European Born	German Canadian Born	Jewish European Born	Jewish Canadian Born	N=19 <sup>1</sup>
7 Years Or Less	4 <sup>2</sup>	1			
8 - 9	4	1	2		
10 - 11			1		
12 - 13			2	2	
University			1	1	
Total	8	2	6	3	19

<sup>1</sup>Note: N=19 reflects one missing case for deceased husband's educational level.

<sup>2</sup>Note: One case in four represents no formal education.

Tables 12 to 20 show occupational categories for the following: widows' fathers and mothers, deceased husbands' fathers and mothers, widows, deceased husbands, widows' sons and daughters and occupation of their spouses. Additionally, Table 19 shows the employment record of German and Jewish widows before and during marriage and during widowhood, while Table 21 shows the occupational prestige scores of deceased husbands of German and Jewish widows before marriage, at the beginning of marriage, in their 40's and before retirement by socio-economic categories.

At the time of the interview, occupation was noted in detail by actual work performed and is itemized prior to each table. However, in order to establish socio-economic categories, the Porter and Pineo Prestige Ranking (1967) was used to calculate the occupational prestige scores. This also helped to reclassify the variety of occupational categories into a more manageable unit to be used for comparative analysis purposes. All tables are shown in the recoded and collapsed format.

From the original data collected, father's occupation of the German and Jewish widows comprised the following categories. For the German group these were: blacksmith, bricklayer and farm labourer, carpenter, factory worker, farmer, farmer and barber, farmer and furniture upholsterer, labourer and store owner. For the Jewish group these were:

bookbinder, carpenter, merchant, store owner, tinsmith and wholesale business owner.

Table 12 shows the reclassified and collapsed occupational descriptions into socio-economic categories. In the German group four fathers were skilled, one semi-skilled, one unskilled and the remaining four were farmers. In the Jewish group, the majority were small-scale proprietors, managers and officials, three others performed skilled labour and one was a large scale proprietor, manager or official.

The following data relates to mother's occupation of German and Jewish widows. All of the German and four of the Jewish group were full-time housewives. Three Jewish women were housewives and business assistants, two were store managers and one was a seamstress.

Table 13 omits the 14 housewives and shows the remaining occupations as follows: three clerical and sales, two small scale proprietors and one skilled labour.

A more varied pattern of occupations exists for fathers of deceased husbands of widows. German fathers, in this case, were principally engaged as farmers, farmer and tailor, government employee, tool and die maker, and two in unknown occupations.

The Jewish group of fathers presented a very varied occupational range such as baker, butcher, cabinet maker, photographer, shoemaker, cantor, business owner and travel

agent. One case was unknown and another is classified as "disabled."

Table 14 omits three unknown occupations and the remaining disabled person. The others are classified in the following manner according to occupational prestige scores. Six fathers in the German group are classified as farmers, one as skilled trade and one in clerical work.

Unlike the German group, five of the Jewish fathers were skilled labour, two were small scale proprietors and one is recorded as semi-professional.

In Table 15 it is apparent that the majority of German and Jewish mothers-in-law were housewives. Only two Jewish mothers-in-law were recalled by the respondents to have assisted in their husbands' businesses in addition to performing their housewife duties.

Table 16 shows the employment record of German and Jewish widows before and during marriage and during widowhood. Similar patterns exist for both groups of women during all three stages. For example, before marriage eight German and nine Jewish women worked. During marriage seven German and six Jewish respondents were employed and during widowhood five German and four Jewish persons are active in the work place.

The results of the question on widows' occupation before and during marriage and during widowhood are found in Table 17, as will be described later in the format of occupational status categories. In the original data the following

occupations were held by German and/or Jewish women during the three stages mentioned: bookkeeper and textile buyer, dressmaker, factory labourer, farm labourer, kitchen maid, maid/house cleaner, kindergarten teacher, office clerk, sales clerk, seamstress, seasonal worker, store manager/clerk/owner, nurse. Three widows were not employed before marriage, seven not during marriage and eleven not during widowhood.

Table 17 shows the results as follows. Before marriage the majority of widows worked, which included eight German and nine Jewish women. Of these, six Jewish and two German ones were employed in the clerical and sales category, four German women were working as unskilled labour, three women (two Germans and one Jewish) were skilled workers and one person was employed as a semi-professional and the remainder was a small scale proprietor.

During marriage only thirteen women worked; of these seven were German and six were Jewish. A total of nine women, six German and three Jewish worked as unskilled labour. One German woman was in a skilled trade and the remainder occupied the semi-professional, semi-skilled and small scale proprietor categories.

Even fewer women, comprising a total of nine, were employed during widowhood. All five German women performed unskilled labour, three Jewish women worked in the clerical and sales field and one was a small scale proprietor.

Table 18 presents data for deceased husbands' occupation and is shown as a frequency distribution of occupational status by ethnicity and socio-economic categories. The occupational categories reflect the following stages of the life cycle: before marriage, at the beginning of marriage, in their 40's and before retirement.

Before marriage, the lowest occupational rank held by two Jewish men was semi-skilled labour and the highest was one person in the semi-professional category. The remaining seven fell between the two strata. In comparison, the German spouses included two men in the skilled labour category and also in the lowest category of farmer. The remaining six fell between these categories. Neither of the two groups were represented in the professional or large scale proprietor category before marriage.

In the next stage, at the beginning of marriage, the Jewish husbands again held the highest rank with one spouse in the semi-professional category, while the lowest occupation held by a Jewish husband comprised the two men in the unskilled labour category. It should be noted that seven of the Jewish spouses fall at or above the skilled labour rank, whereas only two German men occupy this rank and eight others fall below it.

The following stage represents husbands' occupational achievements in their 40's. This is the time when upward mobility becomes noticeable. Three Jewish spouses occupy the

rank of large scale proprietor, one is semi-professional and the remaining five comprise skilled and semi-skilled labour. In contrast little mobility occurs among the German husbands. Like the previous two stages, the highest occupational rank in their group is the rank of skilled labour, represented by two cases, followed by four semi-skilled and three unskilled workers. By this time one person from each group was deceased.

The last stage illustrates husbands' occupation before retirement. As noted in the table, a total of seven persons were deceased, five of whom were German.

Again a similar pattern to the previous stage is evident with all Jewish men falling at and above the skilled labour rank. Of the five remaining German men four held skilled labour positions, and one was unskilled. For the German group, upward mobility is most noticeable prior to retirement but, the professional rank was not occupied by any spouse at any of the four stages.

The following data concerns itself with the occupational distribution of the widows' own children. As will be recalled, the German widows had eleven sons and six daughters, and the Jewish ones had ten of each gender. Of these, five cases (three German and two Jewish) are omitted from this analysis due to death and disability. Another four cases, two from each group of daughters were recorded as full-time housewives and are eliminated from further analysis.

The remaining occupations were recorded as doctor, dentist, lawyer, pharmacist, teacher, writer/editor, nurse, occupational therapist, medical technician, business owner, secretary, sales clerk, office clerk, machinist, computer technician, professional soldier, factory worker, insurance adjustor, sales supervisor, real estate agent and repair man.

Table 19 shows the distribution of occupational prestige scores for sons and daughters of German and Jewish widows by socio-economic categories. A more detailed analysis shows that four out of twelve German compared to thirteen out of seventeen Jewish children occupy either the professional, semi-professional or the large proprietor rank. The remaining cases in the sample are distributed from clerical/sales to semi-skilled ranks. No one falls into the unskilled or farmer category. It is quite clear that in comparison to their parents, these children have achieved much more varied and higher ranking occupations and are distributed from semi-skilled to professional ranks, the latter of which was never attained in any of the previous occupational scores.

Lastly, Table 20 shows a similar pattern to the previously presented tables illustrating fathers', mothers' and children's occupational prestige scores by socio-economic categories. This table displays the frequency distribution for sons-and-daughters-in-law's occupational rank. It is again apparent that the majority of Jewish cases (nine) are



represented at or above the semi-professional rank with only six cases falling at the clerical and sales rank.

Of the nine German in-law cases the majority fall at or between clerical and sales and semi-skilled rank. One value ranks professional and two are recorded as semi-professional. No one occupies the unskilled and farmer category.

Table 12: Widows' Father's Occupational Status by Ethnic Background and Socio-Economic Categories<sup>1</sup>

Socio-Economic Categories	German	Jewish	N=20
Professional			
Proprietors, Managers and Officials (Large)		1	
Semi-Professional			
Proprietors, Managers and Officials (Small)		6	
Clerical and Sales			
Skilled	4	3	
Semi-Skilled	1		
Unskilled	1		
Farmer	4 <sup>2</sup>		
Total	10	10	20

<sup>1</sup>Using Porter and Pineo Prestige Ranking taken from Chen and Regan (1985:116).

<sup>2</sup>Note: Farmer's occupation has been used as the primary occupation in this table.

Table 13: Widows' Mother's Occupational Status by Ethnic Background and Socio-Economic Categories

Socio-Economic Categories	German	Jewish	N=61
Professional			
Proprietors; Managers and Officials (Large)			
Semi-Professional			
Proprietors, Managers and Officials (Small)		2	
Clerical and Sales		3	
Skilled		1	
Unskilled			
Unskilled			
Farmer			
Total		6	6

<sup>1</sup>Note: The 14 remaining mothers were classified as housewives using Porter and Pineo Prestige Ranking taken from Chen and Regan (1985:116).

Table 14: Occupational Status of Widows' Fathers-In-Law by Ethnicity and Socio-Economic Categories

Socio-Economic Categories	German	Jewish	N=16
Proprietors, Managers Officials (Large)			
Semi-Professional		1	
Proprietors, Manager Officials (Small)		2	
Clerical and Sales	1		
Skilled	1	5	
Semi-Skilled			
Unskilled			
Farmer	6		
Total	8 <sup>1</sup>	8 <sup>2</sup>	16

<sup>1</sup>Note: Two occupations were not known.

<sup>2</sup>Note: One occupation was not known, the other case is recorded as "disabled" and could not work.

Table 15: Occupations of Widows' Mothers-In-Law by Ethnicity

Occupation	German	Jewish	N=20
Housewife	10	8	
Business Assistant and Housewife		2	
Total	10	10	20

Table 16: Employment Record of German and Jewish Widows Before Marriage, During Marriage and During Widowhood

Employment Record	German		Jewish		N
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Before Marriage	8	2	9	1	20
During Marriage	7 <sup>1</sup>	3	6 <sup>1</sup>	4	20
During Widowhood	5	5	4	6	20

<sup>1</sup>Note: Of those widows that worked during marriage, two from each group of widows worked for two years or less, the remaining ones worked throughout their marriage.

Table 17: Occupational Status of Widows Before Marriage, During Marriage and During Widowhood by Ethnicity and Socio-Economic Categories

Occupational Status	Before Marriage		Before Marriage		During Widowhood	
	German	Jewish	German	Jewish	German	Jewish
Professional						
Proprietors, Managers and Officials (Large)						
Semi-Professional		1		1		
Proprietors, Managers and Officials (Small)		1		1		1
Clerical and Sales	2	6				3
Skilled	2		1			
Semi-Skilled				1		
Unskilled	4		6	3	5	
Farmer						
Total	8	9	7	6	5	4
	N=17 <sup>1</sup>		N=13 <sup>2</sup>		N=9 <sup>3</sup>	

<sup>1</sup>Note: Three women were not employed before marriage.

<sup>2</sup>Note: Seven women were not employed during marriage.

<sup>3</sup>Note: Eleven women were not employed during marriage.

Table 18: Occupational Status of Deceased Husbands Before Marriage, at the Beginning of Marriage, In Their 40's, and Before Retirement by Ethnicity and Socio-Economic Categories

Occupational Status	Before Marriage		At The Beginning of Marriage		In Their 40's		Before Retirement	
	G <sup>1</sup>	J <sup>2</sup>	G	J	G	J	G	J
Professional								
Proprietors, Managers and Officials (Large)						3		3
Semi-Professional		1		1		1		1
Proprietors, Managers and Officials (Small)		2		2				
Clerical and Sales		2		3		3		3
Skilled	2	3	2	2	2	2	4	2
Semi-Skilled	3	2	3		4		1	
Unskilled	3		4	2	3			
Farmer	2		1					
Total	N=20		N=20		N=18 <sup>3</sup>		N=13 <sup>4</sup>	

<sup>1</sup> G=German

<sup>2</sup> J=Jewish

<sup>3</sup> Deceased in their 40's (one German, one Jewish).

<sup>4</sup> Deceased before retirement (five German, two Jewish).



Table 19: Occupational Status of Sons and Daughters of German and Jewish Widows by Socio-Economic Categories

Occupational Status	German		Jewish	
	Sons	Daughters	Sons	Daughters
Professional	1	1	5	
Proprietors, Managers and Officials (Large)			2	
Semi-Professional	2		1	5
Proprietors, Managers and Officials (Small)				
Clerical and Sales	2	2	1	1
Skilled	2			2
Semi-Skilled	1	1		
Unskilled				
Farmer				
Total	8	4	9	8
	N=12 <sup>1</sup>		N=17 <sup>2</sup>	

<sup>1</sup>Note: Two German sons who are deceased and one disabled son are not included in the total and the two German daughters who are housewives are also not included in the total.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Note: The one Jewish son who is deceased is not included in the total and the two Jewish daughters who are housewives are also not included.

Table 20: Occupational Status of Sons-and-Daughters-In-Law of German and Jewish Widows by Socio-Economic Categories

Socio-Economic Categories	German		Jewish	
	Sons-In Law	Daughters-In Law	Sons-In Law	Daughters-In Law
Professional	1		3	1
Proprietors, Managers and Officials (Large)			3	
Semi-Professional		2	1	1
Proprietors, Managers and Officials (Small)				
Clerical and Sales		3	1	5
Skilled	1			
Semi-Skilled	2			
Unskilled				
Farmer				
Total	4 <sup>1</sup>	5 <sup>2</sup>	8 <sup>3</sup>	7 <sup>4</sup>
	N=9		N=15	

Note: The following are not included in the total numbers:

<sup>1</sup>Two German sons-in-law are deceased.

<sup>2</sup>Five German daughters-in-law are housewives and one has an unknown occupation.

<sup>3</sup>One Jewish son-in-law is disabled, and one Jewish son-in-law has an unknown occupation.

<sup>4</sup>Two Jewish daughters-in-law have unknown occupations.

A review of the data suggests that the occupational profile of German widows and their families reflects the following characteristics.

They are women whose mothers were housewives and whose fathers were either tradesmen or farmers of very low education. The majority of them worked before and during marriage and half of them worked during widowhood. Most of them were employed in unskilled labour.

These widows married men whose families were of farming background in which women worked as housewives. Of very low educational background the majority of husbands worked in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs for most of their lives and only before retirement did some experience upward occupational mobility but even then not beyond the blue collar level.

However, the majority of widows' children are employed in jobs of clerical, skilled and semi-skilled nature, with the remaining ones occupying semi-professional and professional positions. When creating their own families of procreation, these children married mates of similar occupational background.

In contrast, the occupational profile of the Jewish family presents the following picture. The majority of widows were born into families of small scale proprietors where the mothers were housewives with an active interest in the husbands' business. With an average educational background of nine to ten years the majority of women worked before and

during marriage but less than half worked during widowhood. Most of them were employed in clerical and sales position, except during marriage when the majority worked as unskilled and semi-skilled labour.

These widows married husbands whose fathers were predominantly skilled tradesmen and whose mothers were housewives. The majority of these husbands were of better than average education and worked mostly in clerical and sales fields prior to mid-life when upward occupational mobility occurred for some into large scale business ranks.

The majority of children born into Jewish families are holding jobs of professional and semi-professional categories and have married persons of similar occupational background.

The next section of findings relates to data on widows' income. Three tables, 21, 22, and 23 show first a distribution of various types of income presently received by widows, secondly, that reflect the actually received income per annum as measured against the 1987 statistically defined low-income-cut-off for single persons without dependents, and thirdly, the subjective evaluation by widows of their financial situation over four stages of their life, ranked on a scale ranging from fairly wealthy (or well off) to poor and ranging from the present to before marriage.

As one can see from Table 21, all widows receive old age security payments. While only three German and six Jewish

widows receive income from the Canada Pension Plan to which they had contributed while working, the majority of widows receive a widow's pension which is income from their husbands' pension fund contribution.

Additionally, nine Jewish but only five German women have investment income at their disposal. Also, two German women are financially assisted by family members. Income from "other" sources is available to four Jewish widows and one German woman. Nobody is financially assisted by friends.

Table 22 shows a distribution of the amounts actually received income by widows as measured above, at, or below a the sum of 10,599 dollars, defined as the low-income-cut-off or the poverty line. The results indicate that the majority of German widows (six) fall below the poverty line, two women are at that level and two are above it. The majority of Jewish women fall above the low-income-cut-off, with one woman at and one below the line.

When widows were asked to evaluate their financial situation on a scale from fairly well off to poor over four stages of the life course, starting with the present, their answers formed the distribution shown in Table 23. Presently, the majority of widows, (six German, seven Jewish) rated themselves as comfortable compared to others. Three Germans and one Jewish woman ranked themselves as rather short but enough for the necessities and one German woman was fairly

restricted. Only two Jewish women considered themselves as rather well off.

During the empty nest stage, one German and three Jewish widow(s) rated themselves as very well off (fairly wealthy). The majority of Jewish widows (six) were comfortable and one person was rather short but had enough for necessities. In contrast, nine German widows were evenly divided between "comfortable," "rather short," and "fairly restricted" ranks.

At the beginning of marriage, four Germans but only one Jewish woman thought of themselves as comfortable but three German and four Jewish widows ranked themselves as poor. The remaining widows fall into categories "rather short" and "fairly restricted."

Before marriage half of the German but only two Jewish women were poor. One from each group was rather well off, and the remaining women occupy the categories "comfortable" to "fairly restricted" with four Jewish persons ranking themselves as very restricted.

In conclusion, one may say that more Jewish than German widows are recipients of various types of income. When the amount of annual income is compared to the poverty line income, then most Jewish women fall above and the majority of German widows fall below that line.

However, in a self-evaluation of present financial well-being, the majority of all widows views itself as comfortably well off and nobody considers herself poor. While the Jewish

sample was financially better off during the "empty nest stage" than the German sample, the financial situation at the beginning and before marriage for the majority of widows from both groups was either poor or fairly restricted.

Table 24 shows the frequency distribution of either chronic illness and hospitalization during the past year for both groups of widows. Most of the German women (nine) admitted to various types of chronic medical problems in contrast only four of the Jewish women. However, it is clear that only three German and two Jewish widows were hospitalized during the past year. As has been mentioned before, the last part of the question on state of health was omitted since it presented obvious difficulties of recollection for some subjects and the answers were unlikely to reflect correct information.

Table 21: Currently Received Income by Widows of German and Jewish Background

Types of Income	German	Jewish	N=20
Old Age Security	10	10	
Canada Pension	3	6	
Widow's Pension	8	7	
Investment Income	5	9	
Financial Assistance From Family	2		
Financial Assistance From Friends			
Other	1	4	

Table 22: German and Jewish Widows' Actual Income Compared to the Poverty Line

Poverty Line: Income \$10,559.00	German	Jewish	N=20
Above	2	8	
At	2	1	
Below	6	1	
Total	10	10	20



Table 23: German and Jewish Widows' Evaluation of Their Financial Situation Over the Life Cycle

Financial Categories	German				Jewish			
	Pre-sent	Empty Nest Stage	Begin Mar-riage	Before Mar-riage	Pre-sent	Empty Nest Stage	Begin Mar-riage	Before Mar-riage
Fairly Wealthy <sup>1</sup>		1		1	2	3		1
Comfortable Compared to Others	6	3	4	1	7	6	1	2
Rather Short But Enough For Necessities	3	3	1	2	1	1	2	1
Fairly Restricted	1	3	2	1			3	4
Poor			3	5			4	2
Total	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10

N=20

<sup>1</sup>Note: Well off or rather well off was preferred as categorical choice.

Table 24: German and Jewish Widows' State of Health by History of Chronic Illness and Hospitalization During the Past Year

Medical History	German		Jewish		N=20
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Chronic Illness	9	1	4	6	
Hospitalization During Past Year	3	7	2	8	

Table 25 shows how long widows of both groups have lived at their present address and whether they own or rent the accommodation. It becomes clear that nine German widows own their homes and only one woman rents an apartment. The Jewish sample shows five owners and five renters. Length of occupancy for the homeowners is distributed over the entire range of years. The majority of German widows (eight) live in their homes between 15 and 34 years and one woman has been at her present address for more than 45 years. Of the Jewish homeowners, three have lived at their present address from under four years to 24 years. Two others occupy their house between 35 and 44 years. One German and four Jewish widow(s) rented between five and fourteen years. The remaining Jewish woman has rented between five and fourteen years.

Table 25: German and Jewish Widows' Length of Stay (in years)  
at Present Address by Occupancy Status of Renter<sup>1</sup> or Owner<sup>2</sup>

Length of Stay In Years	German		Jewish		N=20
	Owner	Renter	Owner	Renter	
4 years and Under			1		
5 - 14		1	1	4	
15 - 24	3		1	1	
25 - 34	5				
35 - 44			2		
45+	1				
Total	9	1	5	5	
	N=10		N=10		

<sup>1</sup>Note: Renter refers to apartment or flat tenant.

<sup>2</sup>Note: Owner refers to house or condominium.

Table 26 illustrates membership affiliation in organizations and associations of German and Jewish widows and their deceased husbands held at any time during their lives. It can be seen that in the German group only six women and five men were involved in voluntary or formal activities, while all Jewish women and nine Jewish men were engaged in formal organizations or voluntary membership activities.

Table 26a shows only the frequency distribution of those thirty subjects holding membership, as shown in table 26. In this instance, membership relates to the stages from "before and during marriage," "during widowhood," and in the case for deceased husbands, "before retirement."

During marriage, most German widows and all German husbands as well as most Jewish couples were active in organizational or associational memberships. The lowest participation in membership activities occurred before marriage for any of the sample subjects. Before retirement, four German and six Jewish men were still active members of various groups. During widowhood, participation is highest for all women with five German and all Jewish widows involved.

Table 26: Membership in Formal Organizations or Voluntary Associations by Widows of German and Jewish Background and by Widows' Deceased Husbands

Membership Held	Widows		Deceased Husband		N=40
	German	Jewish	German	Jewish	
Yes	6	10	5	9	
No	4		5	1	
Total	10	10	10	10	40

Table 26a: Membership in Formal Organizations and Voluntary Associations by Widows of German and Jewish Background and by Widows' Deceased Husbands Before Marriage, During Marriage, During Widowhood and Before Retirement

Membership Held	Widows		Deceased Husband		N=30 <sup>1</sup>
	German	Jewish	German	Jewish	
Before Marriage	1	3	2	5	
During Marriage	4	8	5	9	
During Widowhood	5	10			
Before Retirement			4	6	

<sup>1</sup>Note: N represents only those persons in the sample that were involved in any membership activity as shown in Table 26.

### Summation

The demographic profile of German and Jewish widows, as will be seen, presents a picture of limited similarities and rather subtle but distinct differences.

Similarity between the two groups is supported by the following evidence: with a mean age of 75.2 years, the total sample is age homogeneous. The majority of women became widowed between 65 and 74 years and in most instances the husband's death occurred suddenly and unexpectedly.

Furthermore, these widows were born into large families and each group of women married husbands of the same cultural background who also came from large families. Yet, today, more than half of all extended relatives are deceased.

Considering this high rate of deceased kin family, the importance of extended family as a means of social support during widowhood becomes a questionable issue if one were to rely exclusively on demographic data. Therefore, further exploration of residential location of kin, as well as intensity of contact is necessary.

Here another aspect of similarity between the two groups is found in the residential location of the widows' children, the majority of whom live locally or within a short driving distance from Windsor. But if propinquity is considered to further familial interaction in old age and especially during the time following bereavement, demographic data alone cannot support such a claim without further inquiry into the nature,

purpose and intensity of interaction process, as will be referred to in the next chapter.

Lastly, similarity exists in the upward occupational mobility of children over that of their parents and their marriage to partners of similar occupational background. To what extent this upward economic mobility impacts on adjustment processes in widowhood or familial interaction will also be further investigated in the following section.

The following set of findings describe the differences between these two groups of widows. The review of occupational data showed a distinct difference in the socio-economic profile of German and Jewish widows. It suggests that Jewish widows and their deceased husbands were better educated than their German counterparts and subsequently worked in higher ranked occupations that afforded more opportunity towards upward economic mobility. Therefore this finding seems to support the literature which concluded that individuals of good education and occupation, which also infers good income, experience a more satisfactory life quality and possibly a more positive adjustment to widowhood.

However, when data on income are examined, two contradictory findings become evident. One finding shows that Jewish widows are recipients of more types of income and also have more real income at their disposal. The other datum shows that when widows are asked to assess their financial situation subjectively, the majority of German as well as



Jewish widows consider themselves equally well off, although German widows are poorer in real terms. Therefore, the meaning that is given to income is an interpretation of how the widow assesses her economic profile that in itself may not influence adaptation processes during widowhood. Thus life quality and adjustment in widowhood are contingent on income only to the extent to which income is contingent on meaning.

Finally, the data on health suggest that Jewish widows are in better health than German ones. According to the literature they should experience a more satisfactory life quality. To assess whether this assumption is substantiated, this subject will be further investigated in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### Life History Interview

#### Findings and Discussion

During the course of the interview it became clear that for all widows, irrespective of ethnic background and country of origin, the most fundamental reference points throughout their life history were, first, the socialization experience from childhood through adolescence, and, second, the historical events with economic and political consequences for entire populations, such as the Great Depression and the Second World War. The socialization process and its consequences on adjustment processes in widowhood will be discussed first. As such the acculturation into language and value systems is shown to be irrevocably tied to the widow's interpretation of her present situation and her coping processes during the adjustment to widowhood, and her relationship to primary and secondary reference groups.

The value systems of the families of orientation define how education, work, marriage and family, social status and trust are perceived by each widow. According to this line of reasoning, it becomes apparent that the German widows were raised in the spirit of hard physical work and little education; they were socialized into traditional sex roles, to recognize paternal authority and were cautioned not to trust non-family members. In this vein, one may conclude that in the German family of orientation, women and children

constituted the lower strata of the infrastructure of an agricultural enterprise. As the following quotes will show, the lifestyles of these widows resemble by coincidence the writings of German naturalistic and existential literature of the turn of the twentieth century.

"You must work in the fields, sometimes ten or more hours a day. No pay. It was for the family. We had land, but we were poor, we were working people. Schooling was for boys. There was no money to send a girl to school. Girls had to marry and have children. You believe in yourself and the family believes in you. You don't trust outsiders." (G6)

"At twelve you were sent away to work in the city as a maid, to learn to cook and clean so when you married you knew what to do. That was the style in our lifetime, that was tradition, that was our 'Lebenswert' (spirit for life)." (G4)

On the other hand, for the entire Jewish sample familism, strict religious adherence and traditional sex role socialization constituted the underpinnings for the Jewish widows' upbringing. Respondent J1 remarks as follows:

"I was expected to follow, and did follow traditional values of Jewish life. I was expected to marry and have children. We were very poor but the family was always close."

Unlike the German sample, education was considered in most Jewish families as an important asset in a person's life and a means to economic betterment, although in practice, education in some families was considered more important for boys than for girls, largely because of the former's future role of provider. Only in one instance was education perceived as a primary tool for Jewish learning.

"In the Yeshiva that my brother attended other literature was forbidden; considered a negative influence on orthodox life. The Torah had enough to enlighten us with." (J3)

While the Polish born women adhered to their value system, the majority also realized that they lived in a political system which had excluded them from the social and economic opportunities because of their minority status as Jews. This in turn gave them the motivation to immigrate and they perceived Canada as a land of opportunity, economic prosperity and freedom. At the same time, immigration reinforced strong family bonds as is shown in the following quote.

"My thoughts were about coming to Canada. I went to bed with that thought and I woke up with it. I wanted to make a better life for myself. Once here, I made a promise that whatever I earn, I would share with my family in Poland. I wanted to get them out. They even had their tickets and papers when Canada closed the borders to Jewish immigration. They perished." (J4)

Respondent J1 recalls.

"My upbringing, what I did and how I did it all happened because of the conditions in my family and the situation in my country. My father died when I was three, my mother when I was nine. We were very poor but I was not left alone. I was raised by an aunt and uncle. Education was the only way out for a better life. At eighteen, I had a chance to come to Canada. Poland restricted us and confined us to lower status because we were Jews. I always believed in helping others after I came here. Canada was freedom."

While the Jewish widows' lifestyle revolved around the values of family life, the German widows' lifestyle was determined by work and the family and served as the means to this end.

Still other widows interpreted their socialization experience as a conditioning process for character and personality. Two Jewish widows recall that their self-concept was developed on humanistic ideals, such as compassion, love and understanding. Such human values compel one to help others and in return one feels good about oneself.

"I remember my mother. She was my role model. She always stressed the values for understanding, for sharing, for compassion. Material things are secondary. It is the person that counts. I try to live by these principles." (J7)

While most German and Jewish widows developed a positive self-image, one respondent grew up under very negative conditions, leaving her with little self-esteem, little self-confidence, no close family ties, no understanding, and the conviction that she was a failure, a thought that was also reinforced during her marriage.

"There was no communication with my parents. My father didn't care for me. My mother was so strict. I didn't dare talk to her, she kept me under her thumb. I was always scared of doing things wrong. In the marriage it was much of the same." (G3)

As has been well documented in the literature, the socialization process also instills in the individual the concept of self. This looking-glass self-concept has

profound consequences on future behaviour in diverse life situations. These widows who were raised with a positive self-concept, a sense of purpose, confidence and responsibility, were able to cope more easily with difficult life situations that included among others widowhood and the management of spoiled identity as discussed further on.

The majority of widows remarked that their family situation cannot be compared to families of today. Hard physical labour by all members, and the high number of siblings common in those families seemed to overshadow overt displays of closeness. But as subject G6 remarked:

"I knew my parents believed in me, they gave me confidence, they never put me down; I feel good about myself."

The second most important reference points in the life history of widows are related to economic and political events of the twentieth century. In Canada, the Great Depression was experienced by all Canadian born widows and those that had immigrated before 1934.

This was the time when the majority of these widows married and, by their own account, it was a time when traditional roles were reevaluated and redefined. The man had often lost his role as provider and instead, the wife worked at whatever job she could find and consequently became the financial support of the family. As one widow recalled,

"These were not jobs that made you feel good or demonstrated your ability. These were jobs that helped you survive." (J8)

Those who lived through the Depression were still young when a return to a more stable economic order occurred. While individual family situations may have varied in the degree of hardship experienced, the end of this era meant a return to traditional roles and family values, although Jewish women chose to be active in the business world. The widow's family was young and opportunities for upward economic mobility were present. As one widow recalls:

"My parents came from Russia. They had no education, at home we spoke Yiddish. When I grew up the 'almighty dollar' played a big role. Then came the depression. You don't want to scrape all your life. You can't be healthy and give your family a good life if you don't have the money. That's what we worked for and it's also important to have when you get old." (J5)

While the economic and political situation in Europe pointed towards the inevitability of war, there was a renewed spirit of economic stability in Canada. However, for less than half of the above widows economic upward mobility was not forthcoming until after the war because their husbands had joined the Canadian Forces. Only after their return in 1945 did these men rejoin the Canadian work force and consequently these families too became upwardly mobile.

The late 1940's and early 1950's were also the time when Jewish membership in organizations and voluntary associations had its highest enrollment of men and women, an affiliation which continued up to the husband's retirement and up to the present time for widows. All widows admitted to having large or small circles of friend; most of them Jewish and either

business associates or met through communal activities. For some widows extended kin were also included in the circle of friends.

"Yes we had friends, most of them were Jewish. Those were the people we had the most in common with. Some were people my husband dealt with. But many were sort of relatives." (J9)

Widow J2 commented that friends become even more important when family doesn't live close by.

"We always had a lot of friends, but of course many of them are dead today. When my husband died it was the people in the apartment building where I lived that were really good to me. Without them I don't know what I would have done. Friends are very important."

Only one Jewish widow's history deviated from the course of the others. She described her marriage as one of dependency and isolation, one in which economic prosperity occurred but which only affected her peripherally.

"It was a marriage without communication, without trust, without love, without friends, without a sense of family. I lost my sense of self-worth. But I was dependent, no money, no job, a small child...where was I to go. Now my children are the focal point in my life. I want to keep them close." (J8)

Closeness of family, religious tradition, compassion and sharing and the belief in advancement through education were the foundations upon which they socialized and raised their own children.

As these interviews showed, all widows acknowledged the achievements of their children as an achievement of



themselves. One widow's statement is a reflection of all similar answers given.

"While I feel proud for the way my family has turned out, professionals in their jobs, high achievers, well it doesn't mean that they live by my rules. I lived my life the way I saw fit. I raised them by my values but I cannot control them. Now they make their own choices and I cannot interfere." (J2)

However, inadvertently changes are occurring in the lives of their children. For instance, the rule of endogamy, mandatory in the widow's lifetime, has been ignored by one third of the widows' married children. While such practices might have meant ~~discrimination~~ in the widows' time, it is rationalized by these widows as a sign of progress:

"I would have liked my daughter to marry Jewish but when it doesn't happen you can't interfere. Intermarriage is part and parcel of progress." (J5)

Another widow recalls the hurt that she and her husband suffered when none of her children married Jewish. Despite the hurt, rejecting them was never considered. "They are part of this family" (J9). In a similar vein another widow said:

"...contact must be maintained with all members of the family, even when the marriage fails for the sake of the grandchildren. Their identity is part of our identity." (J7)

Thus while life in Canadian society of the post depression and post war era produced a rise in upward mobility, it also brought about social changes that infringed on some traditional Jewish values. Nonetheless, closeness of

family and affiliation and participation in the Jewish group were still part of the Jewish concept of life.

Turning now to the European born German widows, the events of the Second World War, the collapse of Nazi Germany, the displacement of Ethnic Germans from their various homelands into Allied Occupied West-Germany and their later immigration to Canada was experienced by seven of these women. At this point, for a better understanding of the following section, a brief description of Ethnic Germans in general is necessary to place the experience of these widows into context.

German immigration to Canada occurred as early as 1749 and has continued throughout the following 200 years, with the largest wave of immigrants arriving during the post World War II period. It is necessary for this study to differentiate between two types of German immigrant, or one may even say, two types of German citizen. Germans who were born in the German Reich prior to 1945 are considered "Reichsdeutsch." The German population, which has been settled for centuries as minority groups in such countries as Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Russia and other Eastern European countries, is considered "Volksdeutsch" or ethnic German with an inalienable right to German citizenship. Before or during the retreat of German troops from the eastern front and the eventual collapse of the German Reich in 1945, the ethnic Germans as well as those Reichsdeutsche from the provinces

east of the Oder-Neisse Line (the Eastern Reich) including Pommerania, Selisia and East Prussia, became displaced persons and were forced to leave their home countries and to make their way into what is presently West Germany. By 1948, West Germany had 9.4 million refugees from those territories.

While immediately after the war, Germans were undesired as immigrants in the United States and Canada as well as other countries, the endless flood of refugees to West Germany eventually brought about the Canadian Government's willingness to receive some of the displaced persons, as a show of good will. Immigrants to be given primary consideration were ethnic Germans. Only in 1950 were citizens of the Reich permitted to immigrate (McLaughlin, 1985).

Turning now to German settlements in Eastern Europe, evidence exists that some date as far back as the twelfth century. Settlements were undertaken for agricultural colonialization by German noblemen and their serfs. Later settlements in the eighteenth century were brought about by people from southern Germany, known as Donauschwaben, and these predominantly settled in Yugoslavia, Hungary and to a smaller extent in Romania, where the majority of Germans were of Saxon origin. The settlers maintained their language, traditions and culture and the majority of people were farmers. However, these Germans were aware of their minority status within the country they lived in. A means of integrating them into their respective societies was the

requirement of being educated in the official language of the country (de Zayas, 1978:17-55).

In 1939, there were 3,477,000 ethnic Germans in Czechoslovakia; 623,000 in Hungary; 537,000 in Yugoslavia, 786,000 in Romania and approximately 1.5 - 2 million in the Ukraine and White Russia (de Zayas, 1987:216).

The story of the Germans in Russia has to be treated separately from that of other Eastern European Germans. In the eighteenth century the Tsarina Catherine invited, under a plan of large scale colonialization, farmers and people with agricultural expertise to settle in Russia with the promise that they could retain their ethnic and cultural make-up. Later invitations for colonializations were extended by Tsar Alexander I and 200 German colonies were founded in Bessarabia and the Crimea.

The special status accords for the settlers were reversed in late 1800 when an intense drive for Russification occurred. With the onset of the Bolschevik Revolution all privileges were rescinded and Germans were forced to work for the collectives. While many Germans tried to leave Russia prior to 1920, emigration was eventually forbidden by 1930.

However, the German population received short-lived preferential treatment during the Nazi occupation of Russian territories, only to loose everything when the armies began to retreat in 1943. Those who failed to evacuate with the retreating German army were overrun by Russian troops and were

subsequently dispersed to Siberia and Central Asia (Yetlin, 1983:223-30).

Returning to the data at hand, one may conclude that the meanings of displacement and immigration in the mind of each individual can vary according to experiences of hardship, suffering, degradation, family break up and so forth. However, for the majority of Ethnic Germans, an underlying similarity has emerged in the way they rationalized their reasons for marriage and their expectations of it, their management of spoiled identity, their management of widowhood and their interpretation of primary and secondary reference groups as support systems. Seven of the German widows were married prior to the outbreak of World War II. Similarity of kind and propinquity were the basis upon which husbands were chosen. As one woman commented:

"You can only find a husband in a group of people with whom you have contact, with whom you have something in common and who is acceptable to your family." (G1)

In contrast, the remaining widows rationalized their marriage as a direct result of post war consequences, namely immigration. Subject G2 commented:

"It is not a question of expectation but rather of situation and circumstance. I was a refugee, so was my husband. We met at the German Club on New Year's Eve. We understood each other... We had the same history and two people live more cheaply than one person."

In a similar statement subject G5 responded:

"...it was on the ship to Canada [that I met my husband]. We came "with nothing, but we spoke the same language, we had the same fate..."

Thus, while the majority of widows were married in the "old country," the traditional expectations for behaviour during marriage were subjected to change for all widows, due to the historical and political upheavals in Europe. It was commonly understood that women did not work outside the home after marriage. In their respective countries these norms were adhered to until the displacement to Germany before or after 1945.

As subject G6 states:

"When we had to leave Yugoslavia you had to work to survive and you performed the lowest jobs if you could find them. Traditional values changed overnight. Wives and Husbands depended on each other for survival."

The same reasoning prevailed for those who married after immigration to Canada.

"The underlying principle for our behaviour was survival, not tradition...you worked your way up until you owned a house. Only then could you resume the traditional role of housewife." (G2)

Only one Canadian born German woman performed exclusively the traditional house wife role, and by her own admission, it forced her into a situation of dependency and isolation since her marriage had failed.

"...no money, no job, no communication. I wanted to leave. It wasn't done, besides where was I to go. I was dependent on him. I lost my identity, my self-respect." (G3)

Not only were the widows forced to redefine their traditional roles when they arrived in Germany after the war but they were also confronted with a different view of what it meant to be German.

While they perceived themselves German by language and culture as well as constitutional right, the "Reich-Germans" in Allied Occupied Germany saw them only as Russians, Yugoslavs and Czechs. Thus, the Germans were basically two separate groups: "We" and "They." As such, the Ethnic Germans were seen as aliens in the German post war society, in which Reich-and Volks-Germans vied for the same scarce economic resources for survival.

This outsider status prompted them to emigrate when they had the chance. Yet, not all family members opted for emigration; some of them remained in Germany and consequently in family became dispersed. One widow's remarks reflect the sentiments of the emigrants.

"The Germans were so different from us. They didn't like us 'Volksdeutsche.' The country was in ruins, and all the refugees. They felt threatened. The circumstance called for fitting in when you worked; I didn't mix with them otherwise." (G4)

Another woman, who emigrated alone remarked:

"First we were in Austria, but the Austrians didn't want Ethnic Germans and expelled us in 1946 to Germany. My family tried to fit in, I couldn't. I left. They stayed. Today my sisters are all assimilated, but here I am still a German." (G5)

The hope of "blending in" in Canada was shattered for the majority of women after their arrival. The German identity, once denied them in Germany, became the mark of ostracism in Canada. Here, they were identified as Germans, treated with suspicion and distrust, still viewed as the enemy. Subject G4 said:

"They didn't like us Germans. We were still the enemy. They hated us for what Hitler did to the Jews, because we were part of a system that let things happen. It made life hard, to find a job, to be accepted as a human being. So when it doesn't happen, you don't mix and mind your own business. We had no friends and we didn't join the German Club. We wanted to forget."

To overcome this identity problem four of the widows were never involved in membership activities and refrained from mixing with others while married. Today, church activities constitute a partial social outlet.

On the other hand, to overcome their isolation the remaining German immigrants joined the German Cultural Clubs in Windsor. Group consciousness was perceived as a means to re-identify oneself with one's homeland. Mixing with "Landsleut" (people from the same ethnic area) reinforced a sense of togetherness and "we-ness," brought about through language, folksongs, culinary preparations and other social activities.

However, it became apparent from the interviews that membership was more important to German men than their spouses and during widowhood most women only hold token memberships. Subject G1 remarks:



"Men insisted on belonging. Women just followed, they were needed to do the chores. Men talk about old times. They're gone. Live in the present. Our children don't like it, they don't understand what's going on. Besides, it perpetuates our minority status. Join something that is Canadian."

Another women says:

"...all our friends were there. But people die, and so die friendships." (G2)

The sense of ethnic identity was put into question and a sense of assimilable behaviour emerged when the children of German widows married. Less than half of the children married spouses of German background. While some of the European born widows admitted that they would have preferred German speaking in-laws, they also conceded that they could not interfere in their children's choices. However, inter-ethnic marriages had negative consequences for close family interaction with in-laws and grandchildren. Since only half of the widows are in good command of the English language they admitted to difficulties in communication with close family members. Their closest contact is with their children who understand and also speak their German dialect. In most cases, grandchildren and in-laws are unable to speak German, and the widows interpret this as a cause for superficiality in family contact and less than close contact with grandchildren, who, by the widow's description, seem to sense a "dis-connectedness" with their grandmothers. The following quotes reflect a sense of assimilation by the widows' children but

also a sense of passivity and ethnic isolation for the respondents.

"My son married an English woman. They are different. Nice, but not the same. We can't talk much, about things, you know, the language. The contact is missing. But it's their life. My son is there for me when I need him. He comes every week. He helps me with the finances, like after the funeral. But even he becomes anglicized." (G5)

In a similar vein respondent G10 says:

"I would have liked German in-laws.. We would have been closer. My sons are there for me. Their wives don't speak the language and they are so busy and so are the grandchildren. But I am old and I'll be dead soon."

Those widows whose children have married spouses of the same background have maintained the language in the house so that even grandchildren can understand, personal contact is close because of it and communication is frequent.

"I raised my daughter, and my grandchildren, by the same values that I grew up with. They are my achievement. I am there for them and they for me. I am not lonely anymore, I am satisfied in my old age." (G4)

Summarizing this above section in terms of ethnicity and history one may initially arrive at the conclusion that at least on the surface these two groups of women are similar since both are socialized into traditional female roles. Such an assumption is however too superficial. Instead, one may describe the Jewish widows as active/optimistic types who perceive their culture as an intrinsic and valued part of their identity, their adherence to traditional values as the

cohesive mechanism of family life, and their economic powerlessness as a motivating force for personal achievement in education and work. As well, they are able to accept social change through compromise, which means accommodating deviating values and lifestyles into their Jewish way of life.

From individual life history points of view, most, if not all of the Jewish widows, suffered terrible losses and extreme pain because of the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime: against family members and against the Jewish people as a whole. However, an analysis of their subjective evaluations shows that historically the socio-economic ramifications of the Depression, not the War, are perceived as the most disrupting events by all widows living in Canada before 1949.

On the other hand, most German widows might be described as passive/fatalistic types whose subservient role is culturally reinforced and for whom economic and political deprivation are a way of life in which self-sufficiency and distrust of others are the defense mechanisms for survival and family solidarity.

The most disrupting historical event for these widows was World War II and the social changes it encompassed and that in turn reinforced changes in individual behaviour to accommodate new situations. One may suggest that their typology changed from passive/fatalistic to active/fatalistic. Their fate as Germans was determined by history but individually they were able to build a new life for themselves by falling back on the

values of their earlier upbringing, self-sufficiency and the defense mechanism of distrust. While their status changed from have-not to haves, most of them have lost family cohesion in the process since the adopted anglicized life style of their children excludes the majority of these widows from close family cohesion.

When respondents were asked to recall the experience of widowhood and define their subsequent adjustment to it, five distinguishing factors emerged from the interviews which may be viewed as influences on the adjustment process. They are: 1) length of widowhood, also a recognized variable in quantitative analysis; 2) past experiences related to temporal and spatial conditions as already discussed; 3) individuality and uniqueness of each experience; 4) health, income and the resultant factor of independence or dependence, and finally 5) the extent of nuclear and kin family relations.

The individuality and uniqueness of each experience was constantly referred to by all respondents and the recollection of the experience of widowhood was filled with emotion and in some cases pain, regardless of any of the above mentioned variables that may be in operation to different degrees for each case during the adjustment process. While verbatim answers for each case would illuminate the individual aspects of experience and thereby render it unique and incomparable to any other case, they would also overshadow similarities among the cases, which are one of the interests of this study.

Therefore, by examining the degree to which the above mentioned factors may influence behaviour, length of widowhood was mentioned as an important criterion in the adjustment process by those women who were widowed less than ten years. Of these the most recently widowed women were still working through the grieving stages, while the longer widowed ones were in the process of reorganizing their lives. The following statement is in support of the above argument.

"Had you come for this interview just after he died, I wouldn't, I couldn't have answered you. When it happens, you withdraw from the world and then, slowly you try finding your way back into it, the world I-mean. You put death into perspective. You need people but also you need time." (G2)

In a similar vein J9 remarks;

"I notice crying spells are further apart now and sometimes that surprises me. I find myself thinking of other things that start to interest me again."

However, the extent of kin support depends to a large extent on the quality of kin interaction which existed during the marriage and the residential location of the extended family. The variation in which adjustment can take place is illustrated in the following perceptions, which are indicative of the range of adaptation possibilities based on individual life styles.

While some literature suggests that recently widowed women still perceive themselves as wives, this study found only one case in twenty where the widow actually behaved as if she was still the wife of a high status person. All other

women redefined their primary role as that of mother and grandmother, as can be seen in the following remarks.

"We worked our way up, and then he died. It's two years now. It's hard to explain what one feels. But life goes on. My son was there when I needed him. He helps me a lot. Sometimes I am angry and refuse to accept. Each new situation brings about new action. You cannot depend on others for help. You must not...I must motivate myself to find a new direction in life. I am no longer a wife." (G5)

The direction for behaviour that women choose is a consequence of how dependent or independent they were during the marriage. Those who depended exclusively on their husbands have the most difficulties with the adjustment process and a lesser quality of life, irrespective of close family ties. Subject J4 demonstrates this point:

"My life was for my husband. I existed through him. Today I am lost. With him I have lost my identity. Often I think of myself as nothing."

Some of these women manage to turn their life around as this woman shows.

"Of course I was devastated. I had leaned on him for so long. I had to learn a lot of things...how to run my own life, banking and finances. That's important. Withdrawal isn't any good. My daughter helped me a lot. Make friends! That's a problem. The couples don't want you and the younger ones don't want you because you're old." (J5)

Similarly, one subject, who had lived through a bad marriage found that the adjustment process was not too difficult and her subsequent life quality improved.

"I had to find my own identity. I do things that were denied me. I get acknowledgement and recognition. It makes me feel good. I accomplish things that I never thought capable of. There is good contact with my son...but from a distance. I want to be independent. I have health and I have money." (G3)

By contrast, behaviour patterns to adjustment in widowhood were dealt with in a different manner by those women who were widowed in their 30's, 40's, and 50's and therefore have experienced widowhood for the longest time. Additionally, experiences and consequences for behaviour differed between the widows of German and Jewish background.

For the Jewish women, the husbands' death occurred just before retirement age. At that time the couple had overcome the depression years and was enjoying a sense of upward mobility, as well as grown and successful children. Their lifestyle was Canadianized. Most of the women were employed when their husbands died and all resumed an occupation after their husbands death. All of them felt that work had a beneficial effect on adjustment to their new role. Most of them were financially secure.

The reasons for adjustment to their new life differed in each case but all behaviour was perceived as being born out of past experience and upbringing. The following remarks will corroborate this point.

"In Poland I had become strong for the memory of my mother. Self-sufficiency and confidence help you adjust. Work, family and friends are necessary. Nine days after his death I was at work. The loss is there, but the memories remain." (J1)

"I never had the warmth and affection when I needed it. Neither my brother nor my in-laws were there for me. I was left well off. But my heart went out for my little children, who would grow up without a father. They made my life worthwhile. For them I had to be strong." (J7)

"I never thought about divorce. I guess it wasn't done. Never accepted by his family. I was a doormat but never rebelled. After his death it took me a while to find out who I was. Then I created a new world for myself. I have reached a level of freedom which I would never give up anymore. I have good health, sufficient income, my family and friends, all widows, who share my interests." (J8)

In contrast, most German women became widowed within two to six years after immigration. By that time, all of them owned a house and were burdened with mortgage payments. None had financial security. With minimal language skills and poor education they worked in low paying unskilled jobs to keep home and children together. Most of these women worked to retirement age for low pay and few social benefits. Today all of them are in poor health, which they venture to blame on a combination of unhealthy work environments and hard physical labour.

While these women experienced the grief and pain as much as any other widow, they had to adapt overnight to their new role of provider. Few had relatives in Canada, those that did only obtained emotional support. They rationalized the rapid role adjustment and adaptive behaviour as a result of the experience that was gathered during the war and the resettlement periods. One woman commented:



"As the dispossessed of the twentieth century we became the innovators for survival methods, but we burnt ourselves out in the process." (G6)

The following remark summarizes the sentiments of the entire group.

"This society sees us as poor old women. Yes, I am old; but I don't consider myself poor, for I do not measure myself in dollars and cents. I measure myself by the values I was brought up with and by the terrible times I have endured in the old country. That is what my behaviour is based on. Three days after my husband's death I was at work. I took charge of my life and I am proud I can manage. I was the mother, the provider, the grandmother and the worker. My achievements can be seen in how my child and my grandchildren turned out. I am satisfied with my life." (G4)

These data suggest that behaviour patterns of widows as well as the extent of family and friend interaction as a means of support during widowhood seem to be contingent on past lifestyles that are founded on culture as well as past experiences that are the product of socio-historical events.

However, all respondents identified the state of health as the most important variable by which widows measure their overall well-being, both physically and mentally. The evidence suggests that dependence or independence of lifestyle is contingent upon an individual's state of health.

For all women, dependency means being a burden on children, other family members and/or friends, an encroachment on their lifestyles and possibly alienating those whose contact they enjoy. The following statement demonstrates this point.

"Being dependent often is a direct result of other things such as health and sometimes money. Yes, I am dependent - because my health is poor, so my a quality of life is poor. I am useless and I have become a prisoner in my own home. It hurts to be a burden to other people. I'll be forced to give up my house. You can't imagine what it means. Health is the most important thing in old age." (G6)

Furthermore, widows with poor health feel useless and powerless and suffer from depression and loneliness, as this remark shows.

"Bad health takes away the joy of living and make a person feel old and burdensome. I even had to sell my house. You feel ashamed to be a burden to your family. They are too busy they don't have the time to look after you. I think old people are destined to be lonely." (G10)

According to several widows, dependency in old age was almost an unquestionable right of the widows' parents. They felt that changing generations bring about social change, which in turn gives birth to changing ideas, and this holds across ethnic categories, as the following quotes show:

"My mother thought it was her right to depend on me when she was old, and it was my duty to look after her. Today you cannot have any expectations of your children. They have their work to protect and their own lives to run." (G3)

"Who would have dared not to look after their old parents. It would have put shame on you if you did not." (J6)

In comparison, all respondents in good or fair health considered themselves capable of leading independent lifestyles. Yet, the meaning of independent lifestyle varied between the German and Jewish widows. For German widows it

meant home ownership, which symbolized the overcoming of dispossession (the vindication of the dispossessed), achievement, pride and security.

For the Jewish widows independence is the ability for self-expression, as in perusal of interests such as reading, hobbies, or organized social activities, volunteer work in the community or part-time work in a business. Contrary to the German women, home ownership is perceived by the majority as a burden for old people, and therefore they chose to move into rented or owned apartments.

Independence also means being one's own decision maker, a meaning that was identified by both groups of widows as being very important. Loosing independence meant being told what to do and how to do it.

"My daughter would play mother to me, my son likes to rearrange the house according to his taste. I told them that it is still my life and I run it the way I see fit. I wouldn't want them to take care of me, I'd loose my independence." (J10)

Lastly, income as variable of support was identified as the least important one by this group of widows. While all women conceded that income is necessary as a means of support at any life stage, it was given negligible attention.

As described earlier, in real income the majority of German widows fell below the 1987 low-income-cut-off line for women without dependents living in a city the size of Windsor. Most Jewish women fell above this income level.

However, availability of income is once again contingent on prior lifestyles that enabled Canadian-born and immigrants of the pre-war period to move economically ahead of those women who came after the war and who therefore had to rebuild their lives at a time when most of them were middle aged and disadvantaged by language, education, skills and group membership. Under these circumstances, one would expect that the German immigrant women would evaluate their financial situation as measured by real income lower than those widows whose income is higher.

However, the data do not support this argument. Despite the difference in real income between the two groups, most widows from both groups consider themselves comfortably off. Once again, as can be seen, their perception and evaluations are based on previous experiences and present lifestyles.

"I don't take vacations, I don't drive a car, I don't drink. I don't buy clothes, I don't go out. I'll get by with what I have and it's a lot more than I had before and after the war."  
(G4)

"I worked, my husband had a good business. We could afford things. But what good is it when you are alone or in poor health." (J9)

## CHAPTER VI

### Conclusion

This conclusion first addresses itself to the findings of current literature which suggest that the sort of structural variables as outlined in the introduction and review are critical in shaping adaptation processes to widowhood and thus significantly affect the life quality of these widows. From this perspective, widows with little education who were either housewives or had only been employed in low paying jobs and who had been married to men of similar social class background were more likely to be poor, enjoy limited social activities and friendship involvement. Consequently, they tend to have a low life quality that is doubly jeopardized if their health is poor. In contrast, it is suggested that widows of higher socio-economic background adapt more positively to widowhood because their life quality is better on account of a satisfactory level of self-sufficiency, especially if their health is good.

Social support systems, such as family and friends are identified as being of importance during widowhood. Nevertheless, length of widowhood tends to influence the amount and intensity of social interaction offered by the widow's children, relatives and friends.

Ethnicity as a variable has often been acknowledged in the above literature but has not been examined in any

thorough manner, while history as a variable, has received even less consideration.

Before addressing the relevance of the findings in this context, it is necessary to discuss the question of generalizability which in this case involves data of only twenty respondents. Although the demographic findings for this study merely provide a profile for each group of widows, it seems nevertheless reasonable to suggest that these widows belong to a group of people from which similar responses could be obtained on the following grounds.

- 1) These women, who were born during the early part of the twentieth century, are either first generation Canadians or arrived in Canada as immigrants. As such, these groups tended to speak their mother tongue at least in the home and practice their traditional values more than members of subsequent generations. In fact, their own children are likely to assimilate into an Anglo-Canadian society.

- 2) In comparison to later cohorts, this generation of widows has had little education, although Canadian born women had slightly higher education than European ones. Additionally, these demographic characteristics conform to the general over-representation of Jews in higher educational and occupational categories which in this case are sales, managerial, health and professional related. On the other hand, the German sample conforms to the general over-

representation in farming and blue collar work (Driedger and Chappell, 1987:35-62).

3) These widows were the products of large families, common at the beginning of this century, yet their own family of procreation conforms to the pattern of reduced birthrates for the mid twentieth century.

4) Finally, and perhaps most significantly, this sample of women belongs to a generational population caught up in the grand sweep of socio-historical and socio-economic events that impacted on vast masses of people. Whether the issues address themselves to the events and consequences of the Depression or the Second World War, the fact remains that many ordinary people in Canada and Europe shared an experience that scarred the social fabric of Canadian society on the one hand and destroyed the super-structure of Germany on the other.

It might be reasonable to assume from the demographic data that the majority of widows conform to the profile of widowhood characterized by low income, limited kinship involvement and reduced life quality. However, the life history creates a different profile, one in which adaptation to widowhood and interaction processes with social support groups are not just the results of structural variables but instead are explained by the meaning that these variables hold for each individual. It is clear that for these widows cultural background and historical experiences seem to be the essential variables which account for the adjustment

processes. Thus, in the final analysis, the interpretation of these events combined with the cultural background of the interpreter seem to be fundamental to the social construction of present reality of which adaptation, to widowhood is a part.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that in this study the ethnic and the historical factors illustrate differences to adaptation in widowhood between the German and the Jewish group which were not obvious when only demographic data were analyzed.

While the findings from life histories point to adjustment process and adaptive behaviour that fit the majority of cases within each group, ethnicity and experiences over the life course may also illuminate unusual cases and therefore point out the variety in which women adapt to widowhood. In this sense, range of variability becomes an important factor when adaptation to widowhood is examined because meanings and interpretation of experiences vary over ethnic boundaries and over different cohorts.

One example of variability in adjustment processes to widowhood became evident in one instance in terms of status slippage and in other cases in terms of regained locus of control and positive evaluation of self.

In the former case the widow indeed suffered a loss in status but in reality did not perceive it as such and consequently her behaviour conformed to the same position she held prior to her husband's death. In the latter cases,



perception and interpretation of a malfunctioning marriage led to behaviour modification and favourable adjustment to a new role.

Therefore, one may argue that whatever variability manifests itself over different life histories, it seems likely that even cases that deviate from the majority may be representative of many more widows of the same cohort irrespective of cultural background.

It follows that in general, this rationalization of present reality implies a process of reflexivity and interpretation. It suggests cognition and choice making which lead to action and reaction, to activity or passivity, to role taking and role making as was outlined in the theoretical review that was premised on a symbolic interactionist definition of human behaviour.

In this study widows have become actors and reactors depending whether the situation demands action or reaction, as was demonstrated for example in the widows' definition of independence or the management of intergroup marriage by their children.

These women are role players when they conformed to traditional values and executed traditional behaviour as seen in marriage and socialization of children. They become role makers when structural conditions force a change in lifestyle that affects values and ideas. Structural changes lead to innovative behaviour and modified roles.

Whatever situation is defined as real will become real in its consequences. This theoretical premise is actualized by the immigration desire of Jewish women who realized their poverty and minority status and therefore chose to leave for a country that supported freedom of opportunity and lifestyle. Similarly, the definition of the situation became the modus operandi for the management of spoiled identity for German widows.

The role of widowhood as encountered in this study emphasizes therefore both the spatial and temporal order. Role taking and role making operate in a social setting that is shaped by rules and regulations which define positions within the network of relationships. This means that social positions and role expectations are grounded in the societal values and social structures involving large numbers of people and as such serve as the given of interaction processes. From this perspective alone the person's orientation and behaviour seem to be determined exclusively by structural conditions.

However, in every day life, roles define behaviour in which the role occupant becomes the primary referent: in the process of interaction the actor defines, interprets and negotiates his or her social order by taking into account the meanings of experiences in relation to structural conditions, historical events and cultural background. As the study has

shown, it is these processes which have shaped the adaptation of the widows to their current situation.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

The following are questions about the demographic characteristics of your family.. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability.

1. How many years or months have you been widowed?  
\_\_\_\_\_ years . \_\_\_\_\_ months
2. How old were you when you became widowed? . \_\_\_\_\_ years
3. How old are you now? \_\_\_\_\_ years
4. Where were you born?  
\_\_\_\_\_

If foreign born supply year of immigration to Canada

5. What is your religion?
6. How many brothers and/or sisters do you have?

Brothers \_\_\_\_\_ Sisters \_\_\_\_\_

How many brothers and/or sisters are living today?

Brothers \_\_\_\_\_ Sisters \_\_\_\_\_

7. What was your father's occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What was your mother's occupation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Was there another person whose occupation was relevant to you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Education - how many years of formal schooling did you have?
- ☐ less than 8 years  
☐ 8 years  
☐ 10 years  
☐ 12/13 years  
☐ vocational training or apprenticeship (please describe

☐ university degree  
☐ other

11. Did you work before you were married? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please describe your occupation \_\_\_\_\_

12. Did you ever work outside your home while you were married? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please describe your occupation(s) \_\_\_\_\_

13. Have you been employed since you became widowed?  
☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what do/did you work at? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Have you ever held membership in or do you hold membership now in any clubs, interest groups, voluntary associations or formal organization?  
☐ yes ☐ No

If yes, what association/organization are/were you a member of during widowhood? \_\_\_\_\_

during marriage \_\_\_\_\_

before marriage \_\_\_\_\_

15. Your late husband's place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

If foreign born, supply year of immigration to Canada  
\_\_\_\_\_

16. What was your late husband's religion? \_\_\_\_\_

17. How many brothers and sisters did your late husband have?

Brothers \_\_\_\_\_ Sisters \_\_\_\_\_

How many brothers and sisters are living today?

Brothers \_\_\_\_\_ Sisters \_\_\_\_\_

18. What was the occupation of your late husband's father?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

19. What was the occupation of your late husband's mother?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

20. Education - how many years of formal schooling did your late husband have?  
\_\_\_\_\_ less than 8 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ 8 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ 10 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ 12/13 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ vocational training or apprenticeship (please describe.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ university degree  
\_\_\_\_\_ other

21. Age at marriage  
Husband \_\_\_\_\_ Wife \_\_\_\_\_

22. What was your late husband's occupation  
before retirement \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

when he was in his 40s \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

at the beginning of your marriage \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

before marriage \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

23. Has your late husband ever belonged to any social  
clubs, interest groups, voluntary associations or  
formal organizations? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, what association/organization was he a member  
of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

after retirement \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

during marriage \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

before marriage \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

24. Do you have any children? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, number of sons \_\_\_\_\_ number of daughters \_\_\_\_\_

25. Number of children that are: single \_\_\_\_\_  
married \_\_\_\_\_  
divorced \_\_\_\_\_  
widowed \_\_\_\_\_  
deceased \_\_\_\_\_



26. Where do your sons live? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Where do your daughters live? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

27. Occupation of sons \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

28. If you know, what type of work do the spouses of your married children perform?

Daughters-in-law \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Sons-in-law \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

29. How many grandchildren do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

30. At what age did your late husband die? \_\_\_\_\_ years

31. Did your late husband die  
suddenly \_\_\_\_\_  
after long illness \_\_\_\_\_  
during hospitalization \_\_\_\_\_

32. Please tell me about your state of health. Have you any chronic illness? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, please describe \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

During the last year, have you been ill that you had to go to hospital? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, how many times were you hospitalized? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Can you remember how many times you have been hospitalized?

Since age 65 \_\_\_\_\_  
Since age 55 \_\_\_\_\_

33. How long have you lived at the present address?  
\_\_\_\_\_ years \_\_\_\_\_ months

34. What types of income do you receive at the present time?  
Old age security \_\_\_\_\_  
Retirement pension \_\_\_\_\_  
Husband's retirement pension \_\_\_\_\_  
Investment income, e.g., RRSP \_\_\_\_\_  
Financial assistance from family \_\_\_\_\_  
Financial assistance from friends \_\_\_\_\_  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

35. How would you evaluate your present financial situation?  
Fairly wealthy \_\_\_\_\_  
Comfortable compared to others \_\_\_\_\_  
Rather short but enough for necessities \_\_\_\_\_  
Fairly restricted \_\_\_\_\_  
Poor \_\_\_\_\_

36. In retrospect, how would you evaluate your financial state, using the same measure of evaluation as above?

after all your children had left home and before your late husband's retirement \_\_\_\_\_

at the beginning of your married life \_\_\_\_\_

before marriage \_\_\_\_\_

37. Lastly, presently the government has set the poverty line for a single person without dependence at \_\_\_\_\_ Dollars. By a rough estimate of your own finances would you say you fall: above \_\_\_\_\_ approximately at \_\_\_\_\_ or below \_\_\_\_\_ this set line?

APPENDIX B

## THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

### The Family of Orientation

---

#### Stage 1

From childhood to adolescence  
The socialization process

---

#### Stage 2

Late teens through early adulthood.  
The dating and courtship period

---

### The Family of Procreation

---

#### Stage 1

Beginning Family  
0 - 5 years of marriage  
no children

---

#### Stage 2 - 4

Family with children  
up to 12 years

---

#### Stage 5

Family with children  
up to 20 years

---

#### Stage 6

Family at child launching stage

---

#### Stage 7

Empty nest to retirement

---

#### Stage 8

Aging family  
Retirement to death of first spouse

---

APPENDIX C



The Family Life Cycle - Modified Format

---

Family of Orientation

---

Stage 1

Early School Years

---

Stage 2

Adolescence and Early Adulthood

---

Family of Procreation

---

Stage 1

Marriage and Family  
Family With Children  
Up to Late Adolescence

---

Stage 2

Family (at Child Launching Stage)

---

Stage 3

Empty Nest to Retirement or Death  
of Spouse (Whichever Occured First)

---

Stage 4

Aging Family  
Retirement to Death of Spouse

---

APPENDIX D



8 April 1988

Dear:

Further to my telephone conversation of April 5th, 1988 with reference to my intended research for a master's thesis of aged widows residing at the Peretz House, I am hereby formally requesting your approval for this topic.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the extent to which widows evaluate social support systems such as family and friends as contributing to the quality of their life.

Research has hitherto concluded that life quality is a direct result of such structural factors as sex, age, education, income, race and even health and has only hinted at the possibility that such variables as length of widowhood; group membership and family and friend interaction may indeed influence the quality of life. For this reason my research data will be based on a life history report by the widow within the framework of the family cycle.

As you may recall, I had petitioned the Jewish Community Centre for this approval at an earlier time but was forced to delay the research because of serious illness and death in my family. This delay also necessitated a change in my thesis committee, which now consists of the following persons:

Dr. A. Ehrentraut - Dept. of Sociology  
Prof. D. Stewart - Dept. of Sociology  
Prof. Janet Rosenbaum - Faculty of Nursing

Approval for this study will also be requested for the University Ethics Committee. All interviews will be entirely voluntary and strictly confidential. A copy of the M.A. Thesis will be given to the Centre upon completion.

In appreciation of your kind consideration of this request, I hope to hear from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours truly,

Uta Engmann (Ms.)  
Graduate Student (M.A. Program)  
Department of Sociology and  
Anthropology

UE:sm

8 April 1988

Dear :

With reference to our previous conversation, I am writing to you in support of Ms. Uta Engmann's request for cooperation with her proposing M.A. Thesis project in Sociology, which I am supervising.

In a separate letter Ms. Engmann is providing you with a general description of her project on widowhood. Her Thesis Committee believes the project to be academically sound and even capable of offering some insights with practical implications. The Committee has also every confidence in Ms. Engmann's competence to complete the project successfully and with integrity.

The cooperation requested of your Office is the release to Ms. Engmann of the names of all widows residing in the Centre for the purpose of conducting a maximum of 10 interviews among these residents. The cooperation of the widows with Ms. Engmann will, of course, be entirely voluntary and the contents of the interviews confidential. The interviews will be scheduled at the convenience of the individual participants, but should not stretch over more than one month. A copy of the thesis will be submitted to the Centre.

Should you like some further clarification on any aspect of the proposed project, I would be most pleased to provide it.

Sincerely yours,

A. Ehrentraut, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Department of Sociology  
and Anthropology

AE:sm

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